EXPLORING THE UNDERLYING FACTORS OF DROPPING OUT AT SECONDARY-LEVEL SCHOOLS IN KHULNA, BANGLADESH

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Abstract
Despite a remarkable development in the education system in Bangladesh, the country still experiences a huge amount of dropout cases every year which is alarming. This study attempts to explore the whys and wherefores of dropping outs of the secondary-level students in the Khulna district. Apart from this, the research also investigates the current conditions of the dropped-out students. Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected from 52 dropouts who were selected using convenience sampling method. The respondents are secondary-level students enlisted in the dropout lists of 10 high schools in Khulna. This study identifies multiple reasons responsible for students' dropout like financial crisis, inability to take private tuition, the effect of bad company, parental negligence, and early marriage. This study also reveals the miserable current condition of the dropouts as a substantial number of them are not engaged in any productive activities and suffer from frustration. The majority of those feel guilty and regret their decision of leaving school. Around 60 percent of them want to start their schooling again although they are getting very little or no support in some cases from the stakeholders. As ensuring quality education is one of the objectives of SDGs adopted by the United Nations, this study will carry values to school authorities, education policy-makers, and other stakeholders in solving the issues of dropouts to ensure quality and effective education for all. This research is expected to contribute to finding out ways to improve the socio-economic condition of the dropouts.

Keywords: Dropout, Secondary Level, Education, SDGs

Introduction
Among the South Asian countries, Bangladesh has the bottommost proportion of children in high schools where the net enrolment rate is 50 percent and the rate of girls' dropping out is more than double than that of boys in sixth and seventh grade (UNICEF Bangladesh, n.d.). Due to several reasons, a large number of students are dropping out of secondary-level schools every year. The significant number of dropout cases at the secondary level is one of the most severe problems in ensuring quality education in the country. The underlying factors of dropping out are related to several factors, including the economic condition of the students, customs, superstition, gender discrimination, socioeconomic status, living in hard-to-reach areas, and

other social aspects. Financial difficulties, guardian's reluctance, the distance between school and home, deficiency of basic amenities, substandard quality of the education, inadequate school infrastructure, overloaded classrooms, inappropriate languages of teaching, negligence of teaching staff, and insecurity in girls' schools are found as foremost causes of student dropouts in different countries (Latif, 2015).

Successful completion of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam facilitates the students to become competitive in the broader avenues of life. Therefore, it is high time to find out the reasons behind drop-out and take the necessary steps to prevent it at this level. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is one of the goals of SDGs adopted by the United Nations and one of the targets to achieve the goal is to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education (United Nations, n.d.). But eradicating drop-out at this level is a major challenge to achieve here in Bangladesh. Thus, this study possibly will help comprehend the nature and motives of drop-out, address the current condition, and emphasize the probable solution to this alarming issue.

According to Bangladesh Education Fact Sheet-2020, students' completion rates in primary education, lower secondary education, and higher secondary education are 83 percent, 65 percent, and 29 percent respectively (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2021). Though the dropout rate of primary students has decreased partly over the years, at the secondary level it is still high. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) report -2019 depicts that the male and female ratio is 54:46 in the high schools where around 1.03 crore students had been enrolled and the dropout rate at this level was 36 percent (Alam, 2021).

As a significant number of female students are victimized of dropping out every year in Bangladesh, they remain unqualified and amateurish in the field of attaining life skills and it stops their mental growth and maturity (Banu, 2011).

Bala (2014) pointed out three reasons—expectations from girls to be engaged in household chores, safety concerns of girls traveling alone, and girl’s suffering from lack of infrastructure like separate toilets at schools that are responsible for girls’ dropping out of school in India.

Several socio-economic reasons including vulnerable teaching approaches, unqualified and untrained teachers, and lack of inspiration persuade children to discontinue school. Children of marginalized areas like char areas, hoar areas, and hill tracts are deprived of education because of extreme poverty (Hasnat, 2017).

A study demonstrates that Bangladeshi rural students mainly gave up their studies due to poverty, being unable to pay exam fees, and being incapable to meet the demands to take the test examination at Grade X or the SSC exam (Ahmed et al., 2010). The weak socio-economic and educational status of the guardians is connected with the dropout cases of their children (Chugh, 2011). In a study, Ramirez and Carpenter (2008) categorized the reasons behind drop-out of schools as home-based, society/community-based, school-based, and student-based. They highlighted single-parent households, poor home situations, homes with many siblings, homes with a history of dropouts, homes with a history of substance abuse and physical violence, and exposure to wider society as factors that cause students to disregard school (Ramirez & Carpenter, 2008).

Smita et al. (2020) pointed out 12 causes of drop-out of slum children from non-formal schools. The reasons are - outdoor labors for disbursement, domestic labor, early nuptial, various types of disabilities, pursuing a liberated life, juvenile pregnancy, illness, unconcern for education, recurrent failure, guardians’ reluctance, intimidation, and lack of suitable amenities at the schools.

The aforementioned literature indicated several motives for dropping out of school in different socio-economic contexts. Though some reasons behind students’ dropping out have been addressed in some studies, the present scenario of the dropouts and their emotional state has not been explored.

Theoretical framework
In this study, Academic mediation theory, deviant affiliation theory, general deviance theory, poor family socialization theory, and structural strain theory were used to find out the reasons behind drop-out from
According to previous studies, one of the largest indicators of dropping out is poor academic performance (Rumberger, 2008). The academic mediation theory inspects the impact of poor academic accomplishments on other characteristics related to school dropout, for instance, deviant affiliation, personal deviance, familial socialization, and structural stresses (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Beyond the effect mediated by low academic success, there is a very significant link since general deviation is a substantial forecaster of dropout (Gubbels et al., 2019). According to deviant affiliation theory, if a student is at risk of dropping out and/or has a poor school attachment, they are classified as antisocial. If a student has antisocial companions, he or she is far more likely to drop out of school, independent of academic performance (Monahan et al., 2009). The association between family history and dropout rates is investigated by the poor family socialization theory. The link is not extremely strong, and bad family socialization has far more of an impact than low academic success (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Low parental expectations and a parent’s lack of knowledge are two factors that contribute to poor family socialization (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). The association between demographic characteristics including socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, and dropout is the subject of structural strain theory (Eitle, 2010). The impact of ethnicity on dropout rates has been a source of debate. It is apparent, however, that it has some impact. Aside from poor academic performance, a low socioeconomic position is a key predictor of dropout (De Witte et al., 2013).

Objectives of the study
The general objective of this study is to unearth the underlying factors of students’ drop-out of secondary schools and to explore the current condition of the dropouts. This research not only finds the reasons behind drop-out in a southern district of Bangladesh but also investigates the current circumstance and feelings of the dropouts. This study may also help find out ways to improve the socio-economic condition of the dropouts.

Methods
The study was conducted following a mixed research design in 10 high schools, which were selected purposively. The criteria of the unit of analysis are boys and girls who were enlisted in the dropout lists of those 10 schools located in the Khulna district. The researchers selected the schools purposively to make the data gathering process easy and effective. The schools’ authority generally maintains the dropout lists. The names and other details of the dropouts of a particular school were enlisted following a simple process. At the time of admission, students’ names and their details are written down on registry sheets and at the end of the year, they check the attendance sheets to find out who is continuing or discontinuing their school. By following this process, they figure out the number and make a list of the dropouts. To determine the population size considering the aforementioned attribute, a total of 58 dropped-out students were identified (31 boys and 27 girls) as the population size. Applying the convenience-sampling technique, a sample of 52 dropouts (28 boys and 24 girls) was selected. The first author who completed his first degree personally visited all of the respondents for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. A questionnaire-based survey method was applied in this study. There were both open and close-ended questions in the questionnaire to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was conducted in four consecutive months of 2019, from September to December. The researchers maintained the privacy as well as anonymity of the study participants. The summary of the total 52 participants and their details are provided in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants (Source: Field Survey 2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Dropping out stages: Here, Figure-01 shows that 63.46 percent of the respondents dropped out before completing Grade VIII or before passing Junior School Certificate (JSC). The remaining 36.54 percent dropped out before completing Grade X or achieving their SSC degree. In Bangladesh, two public examinations are held at the secondary level. So, in this study, the giving up stages of the respondents have been categorized into two sections. JSC is held as the final assessment in Grade VIII and SSC in Grade X.

From the above figure, we have found that dropping out of secondary schools in Khulna mostly happens before the students have appeared in the JSC exam. 33 respondents among the 52, which is 63.46 in percentage, have been dropped out before achieving the minimum level of education by which they cannot manage a lower class government job. According to various job circulars published in different national dailies, the basic requirement to apply for comparatively lower-level jobs like a plumber, guard, gardener, cleaner, sweeper, driver, etc requires the completion of Class VIII as the minimum educational level. Therefore, the students who have dropped out before passing the level will be supposed to be unable to manage even a lower grade government job in their career life. It is required to take special care of the students of Class VI, VII, and VIII to achieve Goal-8 among the Sustainable Development Goals that state to ensure productive employment and decent work for all (United Nations, n.d.).

Reasons behind dropout: Table 2 depicts that the majority of the participants, which represents 59.61 percent of the dropouts, gave up their studies due to financial inconsistency. 11.54 percent of them dropped out because of their inability to receive private tuition, and 11.54 percent gave up their studies because of the effect of bad company. 9.62 percent stopped their study because of their parents’ negligence in taking care of them properly, and 7.69 percent leave school for early marriage and premature affairs.

Through analyzing the qualitative data from the open-ended questions of the survey questionnaire, the underlying factors behind dropping out have been explained. Using the narrative data collected from the respondents, the quantitative findings of Table-02 have been clarified and explained here.

Financial Problem: According to our study, the majority of the participants gave up their studies due to poverty. Most of the dropouts claimed that their parents could not bear the expenditure of their children's schooling.
A respondent explained, “While it was very tough for my father to manage sufficient food for us, bearing schooling costs was quite impossible for him. I have seen my family pass many days without having food. So, I had to quit my school.”

The majority of the respondents believed that it was a reality for them to give up their studies as their parents were struggling with poverty to manage the basic needs of their family.

Another participant stated, “Where our parents have to struggle to provide me and my siblings with adequate food and clothes, how can they afford our educational cost and how can we pressurize them to do so when we are at the age of supporting them? My parents would have asked people for help pass our days and earn our livelihood if I had not given up studying and started working.”

Table 2. Reasons behind dropout (Source: Field Survey 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons behind dropping out</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Problem</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to Receive Private Tuition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of Bad Company</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Negligence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Marriage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inability to Receive Private Tuition: More than one-tenth of the respondents dropped out of school because of their inability to receive private tuition. Six respondents claimed that some of their teachers gave more emphasis on their coaching business instead of delivering class lectures properly at schools. These respondents claimed that they were compelled to give up studying because of their inability to bear the additional cost of private coaching.

A respondent alleged, “It disheartened me that without conducting the classes properly, some of my teachers were inviting me to their coaching for their financial interest. They do not think of the students who are not able to spend extra money on private tuition. This kind of mentality demoralized me to continue my regular classes.”

Another participant narrated, “I faced difficulty in some specific subjects. I never found those subjects easy. My parents could not send me to coaching or a private tutor. So, I decided to stop studying.”

Effect of Bad Company: More than one-tenth of the respondents gave up their studies because of the effect of bad company. Some of them stated that they could have done something better if they had been a little bit more cautious in the selection of friends as they were very talented and promising students in the school.

A participant stated, “I failed to pass JSC, as I used to pass my valuable time gossiping with some of my drug-addicted friends. I began to smoke regularly and play cards with them. I had negligence to take preparation for my exams.”

Another participant said, “I along with some of my friends was addicted to mobile and online gaming. Very often, we were absent in the classes as we were busy playing video games together.”

Parental Negligence: Negligence, insincerity, and lack of skill of the parents is responsible for dropouts.

Family negligence for children appears when they lack deep attention. Around 10 percent of the respondents stopped their studies because of their parents’ negligence. Because of the educational background of the parents, they were unable to realize the necessity of their children’s education.

A respondent claimed, “My parents never encouraged me to continue my study. They did not inquire about my classes. When I asked them to buy stationery materials or necessary books for my educational purposes, they seldom paid heed to me. Day by day, I started losing the desire to study.”

The dropouts could not flourish properly because of the lack of cognitive and mental support from parents. They were encouraged to earn rather than acquire knowledge from their parents. This is why – the parents are living there with superstition and they are unaware of the light of education.

One of the female participants expressed, “My parents told me girls are born to look after the family, they do not need any kind of education. It will be a waste of money to educate a girl child.”
Early Marriage: 7.69 percent of the respondents dropped out of school because of early marriage and premature affairs. Even some of them got married at a premature age as well. This study found three factors that accelerated girls’ early marriage and caused dropout. These are-- eve-teasing or sexual harassment and disturbances created by some local boys, considering marriage proposals for school-going female children in that stage, and stereotype perceptions and beliefs of some parents on female education.

A female respondent said, “When I was a student of Class-VI, one of my uncles came to our house with a marriage proposal from a well-off family. My parents agreed with the proposal without taking my consent. They thought that they might not get any better proposal later. After marriage, I could not continue my study as I used to be busy with household chores in my in-law’s house.”

Three girls among the respondents reported that they were forced to get married as some local boys were victimizing them by eve-teasing regularly on the street while going to and coming back from school.

A respondent stated, “Some local boys were continuously harassing me at that time. To get rid of this problem, my parents arranged marriage though I was only 15 then. My mother often stated that girls do not need to go to school rather they need to learn how to cook, how to manage family, and how to bring up children.”

Current activities of the dropouts: Table 3 shows that 15 dropouts (28.85 %) were involved in a full-time jobs and became wage earners. 14 married female dropouts (26.92 %) were taking care of their husbands and in-laws. Nine dropouts (17.31%) were involved in the family business like working in fathers’ shops. Four dropouts (7.69%) were taking electrical training, three (5.77%) were taking computer training and two (3.85%) were learning welding. The rest five (9.62%) were not involved in any productive activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current activities of the dropouts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job (Full Time)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in a family business</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking electrical training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking computer training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to weld</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not involved in any productive activity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the narrative data collected from the respondents, the quantitative findings of Table 3 have been explained here. A significant number of dropouts work at various factories, private companies, and other institutions and earn their living.

A respondent who works in a garment factory said, “As I had to quit my study to get involved in financial activity, now I am in it. I get a monthly salary and can take care of my family.”

Another participant who works as a delivery boy believed, “I am happy with what I am doing right now. My parents wanted me to quit my study and I think they were logical from their side. We were not solvent enough and it was not guaranteed that I will get a good job after finishing my study.”

Another substantial number of dropouts especially the females got married and became homemakers.

A participant and mother of a one-year-old infant stated, “I was intended to complete my education and get a prestigious job. Now I have to take care of my husband, my child, my in-laws, and others. Now I have to be so busy all day long that I cannot get sufficient time to recall my old days.”

Around one-tenth of the dropouts used to pass their times idly. They did not involve in any industrious activities. As a result, their parents fear their offspring being engaged in antisocial activities.
An unemployed respondent said, “Since I do not have the opportunity to pass my whole life sitting idly, one day I will have to do something. I will try to get involved in something. Now, I used to play cricket, and football with some local boys in the afternoon.”

**Keenness towards the education of the dropouts:** Table 4 delineates that the percentage of the respondents who were willing to study is 61.54 percent. These 32 dropouts were willing to study but could not continue for adverse circumstances. 38.46 percent of them were not willing to study. These 20 dropouts could not accept study from the heart; rather they were interested in some other matters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keenness towards education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study found that 32 of the 52 dropouts had still a keenness towards study after being dropped out but they could not get the chance to return to their schools due to an unfavorable environment. Though the eagerness of the dropouts to study is a very good sign, they could not fulfill this wish because of their current adverse situation.

A respondent who had an eagerness to start schooling thought, “Still I am willing to study. However, due to a hostile situation, I cannot do it. To be frank, it is not possible to return to school because of the job that I am performing right now.”

Many dropout students are not in a very good mental state and they are keen to be enrolled in schools or further education.

One of the participants mentioned, “I am feeling sorry for being dropped out of school. If we get the opportunity to study again it will be a happy event for us.”

On the other hand, 20 dropouts were not willing to study at all. This study also explores the reasons why these dropouts were not willing to study. The findings are described in Table 5. The study found that 10 dropouts (50 percent) were indifferent to studying, as they perceived that education became a burden to them because of various circumstances. Five dropouts (25 percent) did not want to return to their classes, as they felt that subjects of their curriculum were difficult while three dropouts believed that the teaching quality of their schools is substandard. The rest two dropouts (10 percent) were reluctant to return to their schools, as they prefer games and sports, using social media, passing time with friends rather than studying. Among the 52 participants of this study, 20 dropouts have an aversion to education. Half of these 20 dropouts perceived that education has become an encumbrance rather than an opportunity because of adverse situations.

An unemployed youth among the participants claimed, “Education was nothing but a burden to me. I did not want to study. It seems that education is imposed on me. In fact, I could not enjoy my lessons at all.”

Some dropouts narrated education as a burden as they are not motivated in the right way to learn.

A homemaker among the participants asserted, “After being married, I can’t go to school as I fear that I would not be able to take permission from my husband. I do not have any eagerness to study rather it is a burden to me. My family has now become the priority rather than study.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons behind aversion towards education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of the respondents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education became a burden</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject difficulty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substandard teaching quality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five of these dropouts could not cope with their syllabus and curriculum. They feared their classes as different subjects seemed very difficult for them to understand. Most of these students had weaknesses in English and Mathematics.

A participant claimed, “English was very difficult for me. I did not find any simplicity in it. The boring lectures on grammar frustrated me. I completed my primary level with many difficulties but I could not understand the sentences of my book written in English. In my classroom, I just eagerly awaited when the bell would ring.”

Many of their teachers forced students to memorize lessons rather than realizing them with logic. This is another cause - students lost their interest in education. Besides, their teachers are not sincere enough to inspire students, As a result, they found a particular subject difficult to learn.

Another respondent said, “I would not understand Algebra and Trigonometry. I failed several times in Mathematics exams. I was also unable to take private tuition due to financial problems. It is preferable to me to give up study rather than solving problems in Mathematics.”

Three dropouts claimed that the teaching quality of their school was not up to the mark. The teaching staffs of their schools are not qualified enough and they could not present the lessons effectively to them.

A participant said, “I found most of the classes dull and monotonous. I was used to seeing some angry faces around me. A few teachers could teach us through entertainment. Some of the teachers did not take the classes properly. Some of them always rebuked me if I failed to understand anything. So, the classes were not enjoyable to me.”

The other two dropouts have an aversion towards education, as they were interested in some other things like engagement in games and sports, using social media, using smartphones, gossiping, etc., and feared that school classes and regular studies would be a hindrance to their freedom to do anything.

A respondent said, “I like to play online video games with my friends using my smartphone. I also love to pass my time with my friends by playing cards and gossiping. Classes, assignments, or exams are boring to me.”

Another participant said, “I have a great fan of cricket and I want to be a cricket player. Passing a single day without playing cricket is difficult for me. I go to various places to participate in cricket tournaments and earn money. In this case, going to school regularly and participating in all the classes is a hindrance for me.”

The existing emotional state of the dropouts: Table 6 reveals that 59.62 percent of the respondents feel worse and suffer from frustration due to their dropout issues. 7.69 percent of them often get angry with themselves for being dropped out as they forwent study due to their wrong decision. 5.77 percent often express their anger towards their family members because they had to give up their studies due to their parental negligence or family members’ enforcement. 26.92 percent have mixed feelings such as some of them cannot express their actual mental state and some of them do not have any feelings when they meet their friends who are still studying.

This study tries to explore the condition of the dropout’s thoughts or feelings. Three-fifth of the dropouts feel remorse and suffer from frustration for leaving their schools.

A respondent stated, “It still really hurts me that I could not continue my study. I miss my classroom, teachers, and classmates. I miss my good old days of school life.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The existing emotional state of the dropouts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel worse and suffer from frustration</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get angry with themselves</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get angry with family members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Existing emotional state of the dropouts (Source: Field Survey 2019)
Some other respondents blamed themselves for taking the wrong decision to give up their studies and they often got angry with themselves. Some other respondents were annoyed with their family members since they perceived that they had dropped out because of their family members. Sometimes they get involved in quarreling with their family members in this regard, they mentioned.

“When I recall my lost school life days, everything becomes intolerable to me. Sometimes I am involved even in quarreling with my family members. However, day by day it is getting normal. And I do not react in this regard as before.”

The rest of the respondents mentioned that they have mixed feelings such as some of them cannot express their feelings and some of them do not have any feelings about it.

“I do not know how it feels when I think of my school life. Sometimes I laugh unknowingly when I think of my school life. I do not know whether it was the right decision or not to give up my study.”

Current condition of the peer group of the dropouts: Figure 2 depicts that 80.77 percent of the respondents replied that their school-going peers are in better condition than they are. The rest 19.23 percent replied that they do not have any type of communication with their former classmates.

![Figure 2. Current condition of the peer group of the dropouts (Source: Field Survey 2019)](image)

This study makes a comparison between the dropouts and their former classmates who are still studying. When the respondents were asked about the current condition of their former classmates, the participants said that their school-going classmates are in a comparatively better position based on social status, social acceptance, dignity, etc than they are now. The study found that 42 among 52 dropouts have communication with their former classmates and all of them admitted that their former classmates who are still studying are in better condition than them.

A participant affirmed, “Obviously my school-going friends get much respect in society. They do not have to tolerate scolding from others. However, I have to tolerate admonishment almost all day. They do not have to carry any tension in their mind. Nevertheless, I have to. They have a mentionable identity, but I have not. As they are students, they have special admissibility, but I do not.”

Ten of the respondents could not interpret it, as they do not have any communication with their former classmates.

A respondent asserted, “I do not have any sort of communication with them. However, I think they are supposed to be in a better position as they are students. They are not laborers or lower class service providers like me.”

School-going friends’ manners towards the dropouts: Table 7 shows that 53.85 percent of the dropouts said that their school-going friends do not behave with them as friendly as previous while 26.92 percent of them said that they get friendly behavior as previous from their former classmates who are still studying. 19.23 percent of the respondents did not have any type of communication with their former classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School going friends’ manners toward the dropouts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-going friends do not behave toward them as friendly as in previous</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-going friends behave well as previous with the dropouts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dropouts were asked whether their school-going friends treat the dropouts as friendly as in previous when both of them were classmates. In the reply to this question, 28 of the 52 dropouts said that they are not treated as friendly as before by their school-going friends. Some of the participants alleged that their former classmates often tried to avoid them.

A dropout shared his experience saying, “Once I saw one of my school-going friends while I was coming back home from work. I smiled at him and I was about to address him by his name. Conversely, he pretended as if he had not seen me. Therefore, I abstained from calling him. It hurts me.”

It is seen that dropouts are considering themselves inferior in the society, as they are not doing prestigious jobs. As they left school earlier, they couldn’t learn even a good mannerism. So, they felt shy when they intend to communicate with others who are studying now.

Another participant said, “One day, I went out of my home for a walk. I found some of my school-going friends gossiping. I noticed that they were trying to avoid me. One of them said that they had been busy. It was completely unexpected to me as we were used to passing times together when I was a student.”

Fourteen dropouts answered this question positively and said that their school-going friends treat them as friendly as before.

One of them said, “One day I was coming back home from work. I was not even dressed well. Suddenly, I noticed some of my school-going friends coming from my front side. I pretended as if I had not seen them. They appeared in front of me and addressed me smilingly. They hugged and talked to me with smiling faces. It was a pleasant moment for me.”

Dropouts always try to skip their old friends with whom they studied once. They fear going to good places for entertainment or other purposes as they have remorse for not continuing school.

Another said, “One day I was taking my lunch at a restaurant. I noticed some of my school-going friends entering the restaurant. They noticed me and sat beside me. We had our lunch together. I found no change in their behavior.”

The other 10 dropouts could not answer this question, as they do not have any communication with their school-going friends.

Liable entity for dropping out: Figure 3 discloses that 59.61 percent of the respondents convicted themselves for being dropped out while 30.77 percent mentioned that their family members were responsible for their dropout cases. The other 9.62 percent blamed their society and social system for this happening.
While conducting this study, the respondents were asked to mention the responsible entity behind their dropout. A total of 31 dropouts (59.61 percent) imputed themselves for their dropout and believed that giving up study was their wrong decision.

One of the dropouts said, “I do not blame anyone but myself for my dropout case. My parents and other family members tried their best to ensure education for me. Nevertheless, I did not listen to them. I left school by my own decision as I was interested in sports and other things.”

Another asserted, “Definitely it is I who am to be blamed for my dropout. In addition, I am very ashamed of it. I should have been conscious of choosing friends during my school life. I was a victim of various addictions and gradually went astray.”

Sixteen dropouts (30.77 percent) alleged their family members especially their parents were responsible for their dropout cases. A homemaker among the respondents said, “After promoting to Class-IX, I noticed my parents became very busy in searching for a groom for me. I requested them not to do that, as I want to continue my study. However, they did not pay heed to me. Finally, I had to accept their decision. After my marriage, I had to give up my study considering various circumstances.”

Another participant alleged, “My parents often told me that I should focus on doing something by which we can gain financial solvency. One of my neighbors is a home help and she bears the educational expenditure of her school-going child. It is a matter of regret that my parents wanted me as a wage earner to help the family rather than sending me to school.”

The rest five participants (9.62 percent) inculpated the social system as the responsible entity for their dropout. They also blamed the state for being failed to ensure education as a basic need. A girl among the dropouts alleged, “When I was facing sexual harassment while going to and coming back from school. My neighbors and surroundings started saying to my parents that they should get me married off as soon as possible. Nevertheless, they could have helped me continue my study. Besides, our social system did not favor me. Our society cannot ensure security for the school-going girls.”

**Discussion**

The research found that the secondary school dropouts in the Khulna district mostly happen before the students have appeared in the JSC exam in eighth grade. According to UNICEF, the dropout rate reaches the top in Grade VIII as 14.6 percent of students give up school in this stage (UNICEF Bangladesh, n.d.). On the contrary, a study demonstrates that a tendency to drop out starts at a slower pace of 9-10 percent at Grade VI, increases slowly to Grade IX, and finishes with 60-70 percent at Grade X in the rural area of Bangladesh.
(Ahmed et al., 2010). Besides, the overall drop-out scenario of older children of both sexes is also much higher when compared to younger children.

This study identifies multiple underlying factors responsible for students’ dropout but financial inconsistency is the key reason for dropping out as around three-fifths of the dropouts gave up their studies due to it. Their parents could not bear the expenditure of their children’s schooling. Amongst the dropouts, some of them were de-touched from education to support their family financially. According to research, a large number of high school pupils are dropping out to contribute to their family’s income. (Achieve Virtual Education Academy, 2021). They did not want to create extra pressure on their family to bear their study cost; rather they focused on bringing economic solvency to the family. Sabates et al. (2012) claimed that age and gender, together with financial restraints, for example, lack of household income and school expenses, as the chief predictors of dropping out. The government should take specific initiatives to alleviate poverty and reduce the poverty gap. Grants or scholarships should be provided for the poor and bright students. With increased expenses in the education system as well as the increase in living expenses poor people faced difficulties in receiving education, and granting scholarships to them could aid them in receiving education (Alam, 2020).

A good portion of students (11.54%) were unable to receive private tuition and dropped out because of their schoolteachers’ coaching business. Some students faced high difficulty in some specific subjects, especially English and Mathematics, and never found those subjects easy. They were unable to bear the cost of private tutoring to minimize the difficulties they faced with their course curriculum. As a result, they decided to stop their study. A study on 432 dropouts in some Indian schools also discloses that besides financial constraints, incapability to take private tuition and inability to take the load of the curriculum is the notable reasons behind dropping out (Chugh, 2011). Often some teachers do not take proper care of their students and do not provide essential course materials. In some cases, the teachers themselves do not understand how to connect the lessons to real life. As a result, students have a high chance to leave school.

A significant amount of students (11.54%) gave up their studies because of the effect of bad company. Some of them engaged in smoking, mobile gaming, drug addiction, social media addiction, smartphone addiction, and other malpractices because of the negative influence of their acquaintances. The parents should take care of their children carefully so that they can pick good companions.

This study finds that around one-tenth of the students stopped their studies because of their parents’ negligence in taking care of them properly. This kind of negligence makes the students disengage from learning. These guardians failed to keep their children on the right track, as most of the parents were not educated enough. Hunt (2008) pointed out that parents’ educational background, especially the mother’s education level influences girls’ schooling. In another study, Zaman (2014) finds that parental negligence in taking care of their children’s education, lack of academic support from the family members, responsibility to take care of younger siblings in absence of parents at home, engagement in income-generating activities to support families, persuasion from friends to leave school to hanker after job, punishment from the teachers, early marriage and drug addiction compels the students to discontinue their school. Guardian-Teacher meetings should be held regularly as these gatherings provide opportunities for the academic staff to build relations with the parents of the students, deliver school and classroom-related updates, and other information about students’ overall performance.

This study also endorses that many students derailed from education because of early marriage as 7.69 percent of the respondents dropped out of school because of early marriage and premature affairs. Even some of them got married at a premature age as well. This study found three factors that work much to accelerate girls’ early marriage, which causes dropping out. These are- eve-teasing or sexual harassment and disturbances by some local boys, considering marriage proposals for school-going female children in that stage, and stereotype perceptions and beliefs of some parents on female education. Ahmed et al. (2010) also find that
village girls become the victim of dropping out because of early marriage, engagement in household chores, and lack of recognition for female education in society. Child marriage is one of the key reasons behind dropping out according to a study in 2016 which states that one in five children dropped out of school because of it (Hasnat, 2017). Sekine and Hodgkin (2017) found that married female students in Nepal are 10 times more likely to drop out than unmarried female pupils. Research indicates a strong link between high school accomplishments and child weddings in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India (Population Council for UNICEF ROSA, 2019). The government should create awareness among the parents about their children’s education, especially the necessity of female education, and the risks and laws regarding early marriage.

This study also reveals a miserable current condition of the dropped-out students as around one-tenth of the dropouts are now engaged in unproductive activities. It is a matter of great concern that some students are doing nothing and passing their time idly and there is a high possibility for them to be derailed and be involved in wrongdoings. They can get involved in various kinds of criminal activities and can get addicted to drugs as well. They can be targeted and used for different illegal and dangerous activities by different criminal and terrorist groups. However, among the participants of the study 29 percent of the dropouts became wage earners, 27 percent of dropouts became a homemaker, and about 17 percent of the dropouts got involved in the family business around after giving up study.

An interesting finding came out from the study that around three-fifths of the dropouts want to come back to their studies again in the future if they get proper facilities. Molla (2007) suggested strengthening the technical and vocational education subsystem to bring the dropouts back to education.

The rest of the dropouts (38.46%) did not have any intention to come back to school. Some of them considered education as a burden, some of them felt difficulties in their course curriculum, some dropouts alleged poor teaching quality in schools, and the other dropouts have an aversion towards education, as they were more interested in engagement in games and sports, using social media, using smartphones, gossiping, etc. They complained that some of the teachers did not teach properly in the class and encouraged the students to go to their coaching center for private tutoring. As some of the students were not capable of paying extra money for private tuition, they lost their attraction to study. Therefore, teachers of educational institutions are also responsible for students’ dropping out in some cases, which is a matter of concern.

While exploring the emotional state of the dropouts, most of the respondents (59.62%) feel worse and suffer from frustration due to their dropout issues, some of them used to get angry with themselves for being dropped out as they forwent study due to their wrong decision, and some of them often expressed their anger towards their family members. Dropped-out students’ emotional state might persuade them to do something better in the future if they are guided properly.

Around 54 percent of the dropouts admitted that they are not treated well by their school-going friends. Sometimes they were neglected and misbehaved by their friends who were once an inseparable part of daily life.

This study also identifies that the majority of the dropouts admitted that giving up their study was not the right decision. The rest of the dropouts blamed family, social systems, and the state for failing to ensure education for them.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

Nowadays, education is considered one kind of investment around the world. Education is the force that is dynamic for a nation to make a healthy economy. It makes and enhances prospects and bestows societies with a well-educated and competent workforce. There is no doubt that the number of dropout students every year in Bangladesh includes many talented and promising ones as well. If this situation continues, it will not bring anything good to our country.

No sole reasons are responsible for being dropped out of school are nicely stated to all of us. To mitigate this big trouble, we need to take some measures that will minimize the rate of shedding out the dropout rate in Bangladesh. Various pragmatic moves ought to be taken by the concerned authority to make it dematerialized-
Softening the financial inconsistency of the students is necessary as economic hardship is responsible for dropping out. The government should take specific initiatives to alleviate poverty and reduce the poverty gap, as financial vulnerability is the prime cause of dropout. Grants or scholarships should be provided for the poor and bright students in this regard.

Stopping early marriage by implementing the law is required as child marriage is the major reason for girls’ dropping out cases.

There should be complaint boxes in every school so that the students can submit their objections against all kinds of illegal and immoral acts in the school and can draw the attention of the concerned authority. The sexual harassment cell of every school must be functional so that no student especially a girl becomes a victim of sexual harassment.

Addressing various social, economic, political, and environmental limitations of school dropout and taking proper steps is essential so that schoolgoers do not lose their interest in schooling.

Discouraging school teachers not to operate any coaching center and motivating them in providing quality teaching in the classroom is necessary to minimize dropping out. The school authorities should be strict with the schoolteachers so that they cannot persuade the students to admit into their coaching center or to take private tutoring. The government should increase the salary of all the teachers for a better livelihood.

Basic physical facilities like a well-equipped building, water, electricity, study materials, computer, laboratory, and other daily necessities should be ensured at the educational institutions properly to minimize the number of school dropouts.

Keeping children away from drug addiction is a must so that they can pay full attention to study. Guardians should not tolerate any inappropriate activity of their children rather they should try to convince and teach their children to differentiate between right and wrong.

The Ministry of Education should take proper steps to monitor the secondary schools to reduce corruption, mismanagement, and absenteeism of teachers and students. A built-in committee ought to be made by parents, local administration officials, teachers, and neighborhood representatives to monitor these matters.

New schools ought to be set up considering the boom rate of population and quality teachers should be recruited. The teacher-student ratio needs to be maintained for quality education.

The government or the concerned authorities should be more careful in recruiting skilled teachers who can present difficult topics easily to the students and make the classes enjoyable for the students. The government and school authorities should provide all the teachers with sufficient training and teaching materials.

The cutting-edge scholarship program has some difficulties to meet the desires of remote area students. These problems ought to be addressed at once and more stipends ought to be awarded to the children. It is desired that stipends be given to those who certainly need them.

School-feeding programs have to be implemented in far-off areas.

Guardian-Teacher meetings should be held regularly as these gatherings provide opportunities for the academic staff to build relations with the parents of the students, deliver school and classroom-related updates, and other information about students’ overall performance.

**Limitations**
This study is conducted in only the Khulna district so there is a huge chance to conduct further research on a massive scale area. Due to time and financial constraints, the sample size was small. More insights may be found if further research will be conducted considering primary, secondary, and higher secondary level students.
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a large portion of the labor force lost their jobs, pushing them under the poverty line due to the pandemic. The long closure of educational institutions due to the pandemic compelled the newly poor families to send their children working. As a result, dropouts increased drastically. Further research can be conducted on it and the consequences, in this case, may differ from this study where data were collected before the pandemic.

Conclusion
Education is one of the most important factors in producing human resources to achieve development. Therefore, the government must ensure proper education for all. Particularly in Bangladesh, dropout is a big challenge for ensuring proper education. From the birth of the nation, besides enrollment in schools, dropout had been a major issue in achieving quality education. Though there is a remarkable achievement in students’ enrollment in elementary education, dropping out is still a big headache like before in secondary education. This problem must be solved as soon as possible, otherwise, a large number of our population will remain far away from education, and desired development of the nation will remain out of our sight. As financial insolvency has appeared as the key reason for dropout and most of the dropout cases take place in poor families or communities and there are a few problems that are not connected to financial issues, so financial assistance is necessary for the insolvent students of the high schools. However, a positive sign comes out from the study, as a significant number of dropouts want to come back to school and receive their education. It is very much needed to provide support and assistance to them. The process of decreasing the dropout rate from the secondary level should be accelerated for the progress of Bangladesh and to ensure quality education. Our government should pay heed to reducing notable dropouts countrywide. The study will help the government, and the stakeholders take various steps to reduce the dropout rate at the secondary level in Bangladesh, and future researchers will be able to find a way to improve the education system of Bangladesh.

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Conflicts of interest
The authors declared that there is no potential conflict of interest to publish this article.

Author contributions
Md. Sumon Sheikh: Field research, data acquisition, data analysis, writing: original draft; Mamunor Rashid: Supervision, writing: original draft, data analysis; Md. Mahdi-Al-Muhtasim Nibir: Data analysis, writing: original draft, reviewing and editing; Md. Fajlay Rabbi: Resources, conceptual frame working, writing: original paper, data analysis, reviewing, editing, corresponding to editor and reviewers

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