School-less or Out-of-school? Re-thinking Special Needs Education and Practice in Baluchistan, Pakistan

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Abstract
School absenteeism is oftentimes couched in Pakistan's local media and reports of development agencies in terms of "ghost schools" and "ghost teachers." Little has been written in the scholarly literature of the universal right to education about how this phenomenon is affecting the school attendance of primary and secondary school students with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. We propose the qualitative distinction between being school-less and being out-of-school as a conceptual tool to encourage fresh thinking about special needs education and teacher training in places, where public education is understaffed and underfunded, as in the politically unstable and impoverished province of Baluchistan bordering on Iran to the West and Afghanistan to the North. Instead of critiquing the lagging reform process and lack of service provision for children with special educational needs, we make this theoretical intervention to illuminate opportunities for curricular innovation in this under-researched

segment of South Asia's evolving educational landscape. On-site observations at two schools for children with disabilities in Quetta complemented the questionnaires that inform this social analysis. In spite of the limitations of the linear regression model's findings draw into the discussion attitudinal differences vis-à-vis boys and girls with disabilities and fears of child abuse.

Keywords: *special needs education training and practice, children with physical and learning disabilities, school absenteeism, Baluchistan, South Asia*

Introduction

In the Media: "The Richest Province with the Poorest Literacy Rate"

The gas- and mineral-rich province of Baluchistan[1] is reported the lowest rate of children completing their primary and secondary education in Pakistan (Abbasi, 2014). The "Right to Education" has its roots in Article 37-A of the Constitution of 1973: *"The State shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory primary and secondary education within the minimum possible period"* (Government of Pakistan, 2003). Article 25-B of the Constitution strengthened these legal provisions, created after the government ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in 1990 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2011; Waqar, 2014). It decrees: *"The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law"* (Government of Pakistan, 2010).

After Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) in 2011, the notion of "all" in the constitutional right to free and compulsory education increased in weight and pressure (Ahmad & Yousaf, 2011; Ahmed, Khan, & Nasem, 2011). While the articles of international conventions are not legally binding, the two articles on universal education are constitutional obligations. As such, the provision of special needs teachers and teaching assistants warranted swift interventions on the ground where they apply (Government of Pakistan, Education Department, 2011). Baluchistan responded to the nationwide education reform process with its own policy strategies and plan (Government of Balochistan, Education Department, Policy Planning and Implementation Unit (PPIU), 2013).

The news article entitled "*The richest province with the poorest literacy rate*" paints a gloomy picture of the provincial educational reform and curriculum process in Baluchistan (Zaman, 2017). How to explain this seemingly odd situation? as the local news editor poignantly asks in the *Baloch News*. Fida Zaman's astute observation defies the ideological precept of progress, according to which socioeconomic development rolls back illiteracy (Rehman, Luan, & Hussain, 2015). Why does the wealthiest region of Pakistan register the lowest literacy rate? "*The overall literacy rate of Baluchistan is 46 per cent*," Zaman reports, revealing that illiteracy is nearly as widespread as poverty in this mineral-rich land which attracts investors and mining geologists from near and far. Where do the challenges lie in getting *all* children between five and 16 years of age to stay in school? "*Baluchistan is rich enough in minerals production, but it suffers from multiple problems such as healthcare and other social problems*," explains Zaman. What are these "other social problems" troubling the southwestern province bordering on Afghanistan to the north, the Arabian Sea to the south, and Iran to the west?

[1] To retain the authenticity of local text resources, we write "Balochistan" and "Baloch," while using the internationally standardized "Baluchistan" and "Baluch" in our own writing.

"Education," writes Zaman (2017) "*is one of the biggest problems in Baluchistan*." How "big" is big? Does it amount to a crisis or even an emergency, in this little-researched corner of South Asia's evolving educational landscape (Chopra & Jeffrey, 2005; Thapan, 2015)? "Out of *3.6 million, only 1.3 million children go to school*," the *Baloch News* editor reports. And what about the remaining 2.3 million children; where are they? They are *"out of school*," which gives us "*food for thought*," Zaman suggests. We have given thought to the qualitative distinction that the news editor draws between out-of-school children and the approximately 2.5 million children that reportedly are "school-less." Why this subtle and yet powerful nuance matters become apparent as soon as we narrow our analytic focus to examine the special educational needs of children with disabilities.

Providing education for children with disabilities is a global concern (Winzer & Mazurek, 2005). Building inclusive school models to prevent children with disabilities from dropping out of school, however, places additional demands on the often underfunded government budget for education in low- and middle-income countries (Lari, 2006; Rieser, 2012; Farooq, 2013; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014). In Pakistan, 1.4 million physically impaired children are missing out on free and compulsory education (Helping Hand for Relief and Development, 2012; Waqar, 2014). Yet the needs of children whose mobility and/or learning ability is constrained because of an inherited or acquired illness, such as blindness, deafness, poliomyelitis, injury due to accident, civil strife, insurgency, or any other health-related issue, tend to be marginalized in educational financing plans and neglected in the immediate environment of the family (Singal, Bhatti, & Malik, 2011).

When we pause to contemplate the distinction, Zaman draws between school-less and out-of-school children in relation to those girls and boys who need special and additional educational support and assistance devices, we can better grasp the underlying dynamics between the supply and demand sides of free compulsory education in Baluchistan. The ensuing excerpts from reporters' accounts will bring into text and context the current state of affairs in the province, on which Zaheer Ahmad Babar's article "*Balochistan: Still a land of ghost schools, ghost teachers"* (2017) expounds. Zaman's report on the dysfunctional public school apparatus in the country's Southwest, and also puts numbers to the phantom phenomenon.

"*There is no record of 150,000 teachers."* Reportedly there were *"900 ghost schools with almost 300,000 fake registrations of students."* Placed in the national context, one fourth of these so-called "ghost schools" are in Baluchistan, meaning that 15 per cent of the schools in Pakistan's richest province are in the official record, but nonexistent, meaning abandoned, or yet to be built. When Baluchistan's education minister revealed to lawmakers the enormity of the "ghost" haunting the public school apparatus in 2016, the *Express Tribune* quoted Abdul Rahim Ziaratwal as saying "out of 60,000, 15,000 teachers' records" were unknown (Zafar, 2016). While Zaman's approximation of absentee teachers is out of touch with social reality (and may well be a typographical error, since 15,000 rather than 150,000 teachers in the school records are unknown), it does not lessen the total problem of absenteeism among school-age children and teachers.

Ziaratwal's revelations on the poor progress in hunting down phantom schools and phantom teachers since the phenomenon appeared in the early 2000s caused sensational hype in the mass media world. *"Ghost schools' haunt Pakistan despite budget boost*" announced an Agence France-Presse (AFP) communiqué (2016) to international and local news outlets. The first reaction was of surprise; then, anger mixed with shame. Recommendations followed, and new promises were made. The provincial government was "*making efforts for improvement in*

the education sector," and was presently running an enrollment campaign "*to bring out-of-school children into the fold,"* according to the provincial education minister (Zafar, 2016), who is a member of the finance and public accounts committees.

The visual aids provided by local and foreign newspapers on this topic tell their own, and at the same time, inconsistent story of the situation on the ground. The photograph illustrating an opinion piece by Ubaid Zehri (2017) in the *Balochistan Point* entitled "*Ghost schools and teachers in Balochistan"* shows an abandoned school building. Neither teachers nor schoolchildren are in the picture, only a flock of sheep, grazing on the veranda of the dilapidated school building. A slightly different scenario in which teachers and children are absent from the school can be found in *The News International*, which circulates in Pakistan as well as among expatriate Pakistani communities in the West, and in the depressing black-and-white photograph in Amin Ahmed's (2013) article "*Ghost schools' haunt Pakistan despite budget boost"* (AFP 2016) in *Dawn*. Both images show a deserted classroom. Whether we are dealing here with a supply-based problem (teacher absenteeism) or a demand-based problem (student absenteeism) is impossible to infer from the scenes captured here.

For analytical purposes, we shall use the descriptive term *"school absenteeism*" to refer to situations where teachers and students are absent from the classroom, and hence, are not school-less. The picture used to illustrate an AFP communiqué of 2015 in the earlier-quoted *Express Tribune* article, reporting that "*hundreds of teachers*" were "*sacked from 'ghost schools' in Balochistan*" (2015), lies somewhere in between these earlier scenarios and the one in Zaman's article, which complicates matters further. The classroom is empty and rubble litters the floor. The readers may assume that the school building is unsafe and thus no longer in use. Where are the teachers and students? Did they move the lessons outside, as in the picture Zaman used to evoke the gravity of the school crisis in the province? This shows a group of children of various ages ranging from toddlers to pubescent girls. The pupils sit together on mats on the unpaved floor in front of the female teacher inside a roofless area demarcated by several layers of stone. Are they school-less? No, without a doubt, they are in class. Probably they are learning English since the Latin, and not the Urdu, alphabet is written in white chalk on the blackboard which leans against the surrounding wall marking the inside and the outside of the school.

These stones, figuratively speaking, recall the stumbling block that we set out to analyze by mobilizing the qualitative distinction between being school-less and being out-of-school, in the above-described circumstances. What difference does it make? Not much, judging by the visual and verbal narratives that we used to situate and contextualize school absenteeism in the sociocultural milieu of Pakistan's Southwest. Before we enter into the supply side of special education teaching and practice in Baluchistan, we need to say a little about the recommendation and actions that followed the provincial education minister's public undertaking to straighten out the government education records and thereby smooth the course of the reform process. These interventions, as we shall see, targeted primary and secondary school teachers, dysfunctional and derelict schools, and school-age children. Cracking down on absentee teachers has taken the form of a witch-hunt in parts of the country. Ziaratwal's address, which would make national and international headlines in the summer of 2016, specified that the salaries of absentee teachers caught in the purge had already been withheld.

There were other such reports detailing the numbers of teachers and schools, both in the years before this announcement was made and at the time of writing. Some commentators,

among them Zehri (2017), viewed the teachers and schools as the root cause of the *"educational crisis of the Province."* His opinion article argues that they must be eliminated. "Start crackdown on emergency basis without any delay to remove ghost schools and dismiss ghost teachers," he writes in the *Balochistan Point*. The cyclical reappearance of "*the phantom*" in the public discourse year after year gives this crisis a perpetual character, suggesting that reprimanding and punishing school administrators and teachers is unlikely to have lasting impact. In lieu of fomenting this vicious circle, but rather circumnavigating the need for curricular innovation at the tertiary level, we try to detect a spot within this synergetic loop that binds school-less and out-of-school children and teachers together. By examining the social relationality between the status and condition of being school-less and out-of-school, or not, we begin to see the contours of possible interventions leading to an environment more conducive to learning and teaching in the future.

Where does the shoe pinch in the ongoing professionalization of special education in this neglected domain of universal education in Pakistan? A cursory look at international reports engaging with the slow uptake of Pakistan's school reform, which promotes the education of all children in the country, gives the impression that it is related to the distribution of the government's budget for universalizing education. Is the national education budget chronically underfunded, as is the case in countries of the "*Global South*," with similar high school dropout rates and widespread illiteracy among the population? The author of the Wilson Center report *Pakistan's Education Crisis: The Real Story* (Naviwala, 2016, quoted by AFP in the 2016 communiqué published in the UK-based newspaper *The Guardian* and the Pakistani circulation newspaper *The Express Tribune*) informs us that the provincial budget of Baluchistan has tripled, and the public education budget (USD 7.5 billion) doubled over the past few years, so that it now rivals the budget of the military.

A little over a year since the release of the findings of the survey study, which did not cover the largest province in terms of territory, Nadia Naviwala (2017) repeats her earlier observation in a recent op-ed in *The New York Times*. "Pakistan's education crisis is a supply-side problem," she concludes in "*What's really keeping Pakistan's children out of school?"* If, as the Wilson Center Global Fellow reports, "*the teaching force is as big as the armed forces*," why is the school crisis, or educational crisis, as she refers to the current state of affairs, a supply-side problem? To approach this question, one may cast an eye on Baluchistan, which, following the author's note, *"is at a nascent stage in reforms, and a core challenge is the uneven development between ethnic Pashtun and Baloch populations, due to an insurgency there*" (Naviwala, 2016, 1). We shall ask again, why is what one may call the "phantom phenomenon" not a demand-side problem?

Referring to a Pew survey of 2014, Naviwala's article reports that *"86 per cent of Pakistanis believe that education is equally important for boys and girls, while another five per cent said it was more important for girls"* (2017). Hence, the poor performance of children in global rankings was attributable to the supply of, and not the demand for, free and compulsory schooling. Government resources were channeled into enrollment campaigns to promote "*education for all*" rather than into improvement of the teaching and learning environment of government-run schools, she stated. Unless the schools developed into places congenial to learning, parents would not send their children to them (Naviwala, 2016, 24–25). A statement that the AFP interpreted to mean "many parents see little use in putting their children in school" (2016) would, if so intended, be a gross simplification, according to which policy makers and

donors mistook the crisis for a demand-side problem, while, in her view, it stems from the supply side.

A possible way out of this supply-demand conundrum, which has given rise to a naming and shaming practice in the public and policy spheres, would be to distinguish between a school crisis and an educational crisis: terms which the Wilson Center Global Fellow uses interchangeably. They may well be cousins, or brothers, if you will, depending on the strength of the link between the two concepts of being school-less and being out-of-school, which we decided to use as a theoretical and methodological tool for researching school absenteeism at the "*street level*." That they are not one and the same becomes apparent when we think of government provision for schoolchildren with special educational needs. With a view to detecting ways of grafting opportunities for school-aged children onto existing structures to *"ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education*"—as specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—we propose considering the developmental potential of the human and infrastructural resources that are there.

Leaving the "scapegoating" of absentee teachers and school administrators to the mass media, and their hunting down to the authorities, donor organizations, and countries contributing to Pakistan's education budget, we cast our eyes forward to ongoing and planned initiatives seeking to spur the educational reform in Baluchistan. Among these interventions are the province-wide primary school enrollment campaign, which the provincial government sees as a necessity, and the plan to establish six additional institutions of higher learning and teaching in the province, including three medical colleges in Khuzdar, Turbat, and Loralai, a technical university in Quetta, and two universities in Zhob and Gwadar. Considering that the provincial educational authority acknowledged the importance of creating a physical and social environment conducive to learning and study for all children (Government of Balochistan, Education Department, PPIU, 2013), we see opportunities for retrofitting the socio-technical infrastructure of special education in the province and further afield (Fontana & Lari, 2002; Mukhtar-Mujahid, 2013; de Talancé, 2016).

At the outset of our independent inquiry we must clarify that we refrain from using the notion of *"ghost*" as a descriptor, or worse, as a label, for children and teachers who are unaccounted for in school records and the public schools providing special needs education. Such labeling, we understand, makes matters worse and does not help the cause of improving their lot. Indeed, we borrowed the language of these quite coarse portrayals, painted in broad strokes and in various shades of gray, to emphasize the need to investigate the finer nuances of school absenteeism, which the local writers have elicited from their panoramic, and yet astute observations of school absenteeism as it manifests itself in educational and school practice in Baluchistan.

"School-less" or "Out-of-school": Why this Qualitative Distinction Matters

The initiatives that the provincial education minister communicated serve our study as a practice-oriented platform for elucidating special needs education and practice from the side of public education providers. Borrowing Fida Zaman's spectrum of school absenteeism, where would one place them? Are they school-less or "*simply*" out-of-school? Even if the end result remains the same, distinguishing between the two makes analytical sense when describing and examining the

social relationality between absentee teachers and absentee students, apart from the children having disabilities. Focusing on physically disabled girls and boys, however, eases the task at hand. This qualitative distinction, in fact, serves our independent inquiry as an instrumental tool to rethink special education needs and practice in places where school absenteeism is diffused. We use the distinctiveness of being school-less and being out-of-school as an instrument to think *with*; as something usable for scratching the surface of the numbers that tell the reader how well or badly a country fares in keeping children in school, and for integrating children with disabilities into the social fabric of poverty-stricken nations.

Casting our research question in the mould of the *Baloch News* editor who made this distinction immediately brings into view the wide and deep ramifications of asking: Where do children with special educational needs go to school in Baluchistan? A short answer to this pragmatic question would be: They matriculate at either the Chiltan Special Education for Physically Handicapped Children in Sariab Road, the Education Complex for Special Children in Brewery Road, or the other four provincial schools for disabled children listed in the government school record. However, this does not tell us much about the dynamics between the supply and demand sides of special education provision at government-run schools. A thought experiment, followed by an ethnographic vignette, can introduce the discursive force-field of school absenteeism in which our epistemological vantage point is grounded.

Imagine a new batch of special needs teachers or teaching assistants who graduated from a college in Pakistan or overseas. Are there enough schools for special needs children across the country to absorb them? Where can they apply their specialized knowledge and develop their practical skills, if not at one of the primary and secondary schools for children with disabilities in Mastung, Khuzdar, and Turbat, and in Quetta; and then perhaps at a provincial teacher's college? Are there sufficient study places for aspiring special needs teachers to meet the demand for specialized pedagogical programs? Let us now turn from the supply side to the demand side in this imaginary scenario. Here there are no buyers and sellers in the conventional sense of neoliberal market transactions driving the private education industry within the region's developing knowledge economy.

Think of a Baluchi girl who was born blind. Where would her caretaker, who refutes the generalizing observation that many parents are indifferent to their children's education, enroll the child if she dropped out of any of the six provincial schools for children with disabilities listed in the provincial records? Imagine a Baluchi schoolboy, maimed in a suicide attack on a hospital or a place of worship in town. Will he be able to enroll in Sariab or Brewery Road, or are these schools filled beyond their capacity to take in new students? On reading the introspective account of Omar (not his real name), ask yourself whether this boy is school-less or out-of-school.

> *You know, I used to go to school until I was in fifth grade. As I could not walk, my father carried me on his shoulders. He took me to school and then from school to home. Since I am grown up now, he cannot do so any longer. My father is poor, poor enough that he cannot afford to arrange a wheelchair for me to go to school. He also cannot afford to pay for books, stationery, school uniform and medicine so that I may continue my studies at school and complete my education […]. You see, it is very boring to be at home all the time. There, I am alone and nobody is willing to play with me. I ask my father to allow me to go into the street. At least, here I can see students going to school and college. People try to ignore me, but I try to draw their attention towards me. I ask them for goods and*

money. In all earnest, I have a strong desire to get educated but it is not possible. [Fieldwork archive 2016].

"*But it is not possible*," said Omar. Why? Why was it not possible for him to go back to school? He looked up and asked bluntly, "Do you know somebody to help me get education?" We placed his question within the immediate milieu that produced it, using the subtle distinction between being school-less and being out-of-school that shines through the boy's narrative. His actual name is in the records of one of the two schools that supported our study, as we "sniffed out" possibilities for fortifying the special education apparatus within existing educational and school structures. What are the opportunities for school-leavers to return to school? Technically, going back to school is possible, but in the social reality of everyday education and teaching practice, it is revealed as difficult.

Our face-to-face interactions with teachers, parents, educators, policy advisors and reformers in Quetta with whom we raised the integration and reintegration of disabled children in the universal education system exposed the difficulties of returning to school. By combining the question of *where* children with physical impairments and learning difficulties go to school with the question of *why*, at some point, they discontinued their education, we find ourselves in the midst of the conundrum elucidated by the kind of reports used in the funding deliberations of transnational organizations, international and national donors, non-government organizations, and government agencies. Not long after setting out to identify key factors and forces that keep the school enrollment rate of children with disabilities low and their dropout rate high in Baluchistan, we stumbled over an issue that is constitutive of the subject under investigation.

In the Southwest, as well as in other parts of Pakistan, it is not uncommon that parents feel shame, suffer acute stress, and respond with violence when their daughters and sons underperform at school (Farooq, 2003). Through our participatory study that was collaborative in the strict sense of the term, we gradually apprehended the extent to which the cognitive, behavioral, and social attitudes towards children with disabilities affected their enrollment and dropout rate. Attitudinal differences compromised not just ongoing efforts to build an inclusive school system (UNESCO 2006), but also the professionalization of special education training and practice. Since the outlined course of primary and secondary education at the provincial level is geared towards wider enrollment of children, we may well envision a wider enrollment of aspiring teachers in specialized pedagogical education and training programs.

Raising this matter in the current climate that resembles an educational spring is both topical and timely, considering the provincial education minister's plan to establish additional colleges and universities for specialized professions. Unless the quality of teaching and the attendance of teachers improve, many parents in Pakistan see little use in enrolling their children in school. Furthermore, "if schools act as daycares, where children face the risk of sexual and physical abuse from adults, especially girls at the hands of male teachers, then working or staying at home can make more sense," one of the two interlocutors remarked.

While awareness campaigns are one possible means of sensitizing parents and the wider population about the importance of enrolling all children in school, we learned from parents of children with disabilities that their integration into the public school system (Peters, 2013; Malik & Umi Binti Abdul Manaf, 2015) caused them concern. Without being unduly judgmental, we considered this attitudinal bias in our questionnaire. We did not anticipate that questions related

to the level of satisfaction with the school would bring into focus the perception of children with special educational needs. By no means did we include this culturally sensitive matter in our field-based survey in order to single out ill-treatment of schoolchildren; rather it was to draw attention to unchanged and changing attitudes of parents, teachers, educators, and educational policy reformers and advisors towards the schooling of children with disabilities.

Situating the cybernetic loop between being school-less and being out-of-school in the province of human rights discourse brings up the question of how children in Baluch townships, villages, and hamlets are perceived in comparison to healthy children. Zaman (2017) observed that "Out of school children are mostly forced to work as laborers and are the victim of child abuse," thus splitting one and the same problem into two (since child labor is a form of child abuse). His observation on children without disabilities being abused prompts the question of how boys and girls who are unfit to work in the fields, orchards, households, businesses, and the construction, mining, manufacturing, and garment industries are treated by their peers, siblings, parents, and other adults. Do they face hostility? Are they harassed because of a visible and otherwise noticeable health condition that sets them apart? As the statistical analysis of our primary data set would reveal, attitudinal differences and satisfaction with school were among the hypothesized factors of our survey that correlated positively with the school dropout rate (besides the professional occupation and educational level of the household head, the annual income, and the number of dependents).

A Case Study

Two of the six schools for children with disabilities established in the province participated in a survey of one hundred households, each with a disabled child. They were drawn randomly from the school records of Chiltan Special Education for Physically Handicapped Children in Sariab Road and the Education Complex for Special Children in Brewery Road in the district of Quetta. Although we did not group the households into linguistic, ethnic, and religious clusters, the survey sample is inclusive and in that it reflects the heterogeneous composition of the population, comprising members of the Baluch, Pashtun, Sindhi, Panjabi, and Hazera communities. This paper, as has already been indicated, results from an independent interrogation of school absenteeism and was a collaborative undertaking with the two schools that participated in this case study.

A group of teachers and other members of staff contributed to the data elevation in more than one way. They contacted 50 of the 100 surveyed households, while we reached out to the other half. The caregivers of the children in the school records compiled the questionnaires, containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions, at these two schools. For the quantitative data analysis, we consulted secondary data on the net enrollment of children, the dropout rate, the number of teachers and schools, and demographic data of persons with disabilities. In order to generate a *relational* understanding of the demand side and the supply side of special education, we formed two focus groups with teachers and educators, and two groups with the principal caretakers of the children. Each of the four focus groups comprised six to eight members.

The aim and objective of discussing school enrollment and the dropout rate of physically impaired children primarily served to compensate for the statistical abstraction and rigidity of the linear regression model that revealed a 61 percent variation. We used the software program

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and the specifications of the model for which we selected "best fit" as the "Enter Method" are the following:

$Y = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \ldots + b_nx_n + u_i$
Y = dropout rate of physically disabled children (at household level)
b_0 = constant
b_1-b_n = Coefficient of the independent variables
u_i = *random term*
$\Sigma_{n=100}$ = Households

Table 1. The regression coefficients of variables influencing the dropout of children with disabilities based on the field survey conducted in 2017

Variables	Description	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant		15.802	3.154		5.011	.000
x_1. Age of the household head	Scale data	-.024	.045	-.134	-.543	.593
x_2. Educational level	1 literate; 0 illiterate	2.565	.959	.551	2.674	.014
x_3. Principal occupation	1 waged; 0 salaried	-2.302	1.086	-.505	-2.119	.046
x_4. Household size	Number	-2.226E-6	.000	-.209	-.850	.405
x_5. Family type	1 nuclear; 0 joint	1.204	.844	.244	1.426	.169
x_6. Breadwinner/s	Number	-2.068	1.697	-.269	-1.219	.237
x_7. Annual income	Number	3.819	1.423	5.867	2.684	.014
x_8. Dependent/s	Number	-3.602	1.404	-5.515	-2.565	.018
x_9. Distance to school	Kilometers (km)	-.286	.116	-.558	-2.475	.022
x_{10}. General attitude to disabled children	1 friendly; 0 hostile	-3.533	.805	-.759	-4.389	.000
x_{11}. Scholarships	1 awarded; 0 absent	1.651	1.030	.373	1.604	.124
x_{12}. Satisfaction with the school	1 satisfied; 0 dissatisfied	-.780	.811	-.152	-.961	.347

The survey findings summarized in Table 1 show that six factors increase the risk of special needs children interrupting their studies before reaching the age of sixteen. Whether the head of the household is literate or illiterate (x_2) was revealed as affecting the number of years the child spent in school. Fifty-two percent of the household heads were literate. This is six percent higher than the overall literacy rate of Baluchistan. Fifteen percent of the respondents affirmed that the household head held a secondary school certificate (14 years of education). Twelve percent had completed their primary education, whereas 14 percent left education at an intermediate level, and the remaining 11 percent abandoned school before attaining this level.

The annual household income (x_3) proved a decisive factor. Most dropout cases occurred in illiterate and poor households. Households with a low income and with the main breadwinner

earning wages showed a propensity to rate schooling for their physically disabled child as "*not very important*." Unsurprisingly then, a lower household income heightened the risk that the child would terminate his/her education prematurely. Even though lower-income households assigned less importance to their disabled child's education, they worried about the child's future. Forty-eight percent of the respondents with a low income and additional dependents (seven or more people) reported that their household budget prevented them from sending their child to school. Even though compulsory education is technically free, there are associated costs, such as the school uniform and, pre-eminently, assistive devices that the child needs to go to school. Thirteen percent of the surveyed households acknowledged that they could not afford wheelchairs, crutches, sticks, and the like, let alone hearing aids or books in Braille.

Caregivers achieving a higher annual income fared better in ensuring that the child went to school, compared to households headed by an unschooled or poorly schooled person earning wages. Parents with higher qualifications and a larger income significantly prevented their child from dropping out of school. Children living in households with self-employed and salaried breadwinners improved their circumstances. Over half of the sampled households, however, relied on daily wages. Households with an unstable income and primary reliance on wages doubled the risk of the child leaving school early in life. Forty-three per cent of the households recorded a stable income (x_3). Households in which the head attained a higher level of education (x_2), households with fewer members (x_4), and nuclear families (x_5) were shown to be more attentive to the child's school performance and more likely to prevent the child from missing out on primary and secondary education.

Large family size and high dependency rates were shown to augment the likelihood of a child dropping out of school. The increasing number of household members due to birth and marriage was revealed as adding to the pressure on low-income households. In some cases, family growth pushed parents to take the child out of school and opt out of re-enrollment schemes. The overall attitude of the household members to the child's disability (x_{10}) was shown to affect the length of a child's education and to correlate with the level of satisfaction with the school, as well as with the distance to the school. The distance between the school and the child's home (x_9) are negatively correlated. The farther away the school, the more likely the child was to drop out of school. Five kilometers was the average distance to the two schools. Parents remarked that the long distance, made worse by the dense traffic during rush hours, exhausted the children. Another stress factor was the physical hurdles that hindered the mobility of the children and even imperiled them.

Step-free access to buildings and ramps, sanitary facilities for disabled people, as well as well-maintained and managed playgrounds, were pivotal for creating a safe environment for children and minimizing accidents and injuries, according to focus group participants. The overall safety of the child on the way to school and inside it is a source of concern for parents. They wish that their child had shorter distances to travel. Ninety-eight percent of the children used the free school bus, while the remaining two percent were either boarders or walked to school. Fifty-one households asserted that they were extremely dissatisfied with the availability of assistive devices at the schools. While the presence of physiotherapists was appreciated by many respondents, they were dissatisfied with the equipment used during physiotherapy. Hygiene and food safety were reported as major concerns. Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents acknowledged dissatisfaction with the quality of the drinking water.

Responding to the question of how satisfied they are with the school, 14 percent of the households expressed dissatisfaction. They voiced their disappointment at hearing that their

daughter or son had reported instances of discrimination and even harm done them by teachers and supporting staff. These harsh encounters affected the children's attitude to going to school, leading them to ask their parents to let them opt out of schooling.

With regard to the affective, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes towards the education of children with disabilities, our survey showed that a considerable share of the interviewed parents cared about their offspring's schooling. Twenty-five percent of the surveyed households worried about what happened after matriculation, and especially about what would happen if the child dropped out. Could their daughter or son be re-enrolled? they asked. Omar's father may have contemplated that same question. If he had the means for a wheelchair, would his son return to his old school on Brewery Road?

When asked about their attitude to coeducation, 68 percent of the respondents replied that they would rather not enroll their child in a regular school. In their view and as they understood it, boys and girls with special educational needs would not adapt easily to studying among children without disabilities. They might feel inferior in the latter's presence, the parents reasoned. During the focus group discussions with teachers, we learned that the older girls had to leave school because of the school's coeducation system and the recruitment of male staff. While we did not observe abusive behavior towards the children by schoolteachers and staff, parents told us that it had occurred.

In their accounts, there were a few staff members causing female students distress during physiotherapy. Such reports inevitably fuel the negative attitudes of parents and students towards physical exercise and rehabilitation. Indeed, 31 percent of the parents said that they were unwilling to send their daughters to school because they feared male staff could take advantage of the situation and abuse the girls. Even though these statistically-derived insights, including those related to attitudes and satisfaction, are unspectacular in that they echo the situation analysis of universal education in Pakistan (Memon, 2007; Tahir, Akhter, Azam & Saeed, 2012), they drew our attention to the need for surveys written at eye level.

The limitations of this statistical approach emerged as we noticed that the information we could extract from the survey data were insufficient for expounding on the correlation between the attitudes of the household members and the dropout rate, and between the latter and the level of satisfaction with the provision of special need education. The binary opposites we used, namely friendly and hostile, and satisfied and dissatisfied, did not produce the fine-grained picture of school absenteeism that an ethnographic research approach would deliver. Notwithstanding these shortcomings that relate to the choice of method, our interactions in the field were invaluable insofar as they allowed us to point out the need for a detailed and nuanced descriptions of people's attitudes, which statistical approaches and abstractions capture poorly.

Looking into the Future

Bringing children with disabilities and special educational needs into the fold of the primary and secondary school apparatus requires retrofitting the socio-technical infrastructure of special education. As previously explained, we sought possibilities for grafting opportunities for school-aged children onto existing structures to "ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education," as specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. With this in view, we proposed considering the developmental potential of the available resources through this theoretical intervention that mobilized the qualitative distinction between being out-of-school and school-less. Against the backdrop of our empirical study findings, and despite the limitations of our

statistical analysis for capturing attitudinal differences in greater depth and detail, we understand that there is a sense of urgency about intensifying the professionalization of teaching children with disabilities in Baluchistan.

In order to develop socially, culturally, and locally relevant special education programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, a deeper understanding of the attitudinal differences through ethnographic inquiry into schooling in the South Asia region (Thapan, 2014; Bhatia 2015) would be useful and meaningful. In particular, we see curricular innovation and diversification at tertiary educational institutions, and professional training for special needs teachers, physiotherapists, community nurses, nutritional advisors, and other support staff at schools for disabled children as means of embarking on the path charted in Baluchistan's latest educational policy plan. Such steps may awaken this dormant and neglected domain in the growing education industry of Pakistan and of the wider South Asia region.

The accumulation of news reports about absentee teachers, abandoned and dilapidated schools, and high numbers of school-less and out-of-school children in the national and international media adds a sense of urgency to the problem of school absenteeism that seems to have developed a life of its own in the Southwest of the country. We understand that the plan announced by Baluchistan's education minister to establish new colleges and universities will stand special education training and practice in good stead. What could be involved in the potential transactions between provincial teacher colleges and the six established schools for children with physical impairments, of which two schools participated in our survey, is worth pondering at this time of renewed interest in the educational reform process.

Rather than seeing children with disabilities as a burden for society, we proposed a conceptual shift. Instead of bemoaning the special educational needs of children and viewing them as an impediment, or worse, as a burden, we like to see them as a valuable human resource for developing a niche market in Pakistan's evolving education industry. The fact that teaching children with disabilities requires specialized knowledge and specific training creates hidden opportunities that warrant closer examination. Although our study's findings confirmed that infrastructural and socioeconomic factors—such as the school distance, parents' educational level and occupation, and household income (Khatoon 2003; Ahmed, 2011; Badini, 2011; Khan & Nasem, 2011; Abbasi, 2012; Singal, 2016)—are slowing the uptake of universal education and thus the reform process, we paid attention to new apertures in the evolving educational landscape of this lesser researched region.

We looked for signs indicating fresh prospects in this poorly developed service sector in lieu of casting our eyes backwards to assess the implementation of constitutional articles 25-B and 37-A (Khatoon, 2003; Singal, 2016). The individual and social attitudes hovering over the supply and demand sides of schooling children who require additional educational support, assistive devices, physiotherapy, and medication (Haider, 2008) gave us good reason to argue for innovations in special education training. Such measures would create, besides additional study places for aspiring teachers, incentives for the present generation of primary and secondary school teachers to support international efforts to improve the human resource pool and the physical infrastructure from below. Without curricular innovation and new partnerships and alliances in this public domain (the health sector, as a possibility), where business activities are not aligned with neoliberal principles and yet can be entrepreneurial, the educational reform process will remain stuck.

This stumbling block, which adds weight to the cybernetic loop that we have presented by considering the interrelationship between being school-less and being out-of-school, became apparent when teachers and parents elaborated on their dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs at schools for children with disabilities. Our proposal to fortify the special education apparatus at the provincial level buys into the increasing awareness on the part of educational policy makers and administrators of teachers' colleges, teachers and support staff, of the need to diversify and broaden the methodological toolkit for teaching special needs children; to develop analytical and creative approaches with which to respond to the additional educational requirements of physically impaired pupils; and to understand why and how modifying teaching, communication, and leadership styles and techniques can help in dealing more effectively with distressing and frustrating situations.

With a view to turning the inadequate supply of pedagogical courses into an opportunity, our survey elucidated why we argue for intensifying the professionalization of special education, while distancing ourselves from the ways the school crisis has been dealt with, pictured, and conceptualized in the media. Rather than elaborating on the infrastructural, institutional, and socioeconomic constraints associated with schooling physically and mentally impaired children in Pakistan, we reiterate, and put on the map of this roughly chartered territory of South Asia's educational landscape, the relationality between being school-less and being out-of-school.

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