

Received: 09 March 2024, Accepted: 25 April 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9il.38>

Factors Affecting Transition from School to Madrassa Education: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Madrasa, a religious educational institution, holds a prominent position in the socialization of religious values, and moral teachings in various academic disciplines. These institutions are products of the socio-cultural and geographical realities of the societies. Growing number in enrollment of students in the Madrassa education system has been noticed in the recent past across the country, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A significant proportion of students are transitioning from contemporary education schools to the Madrassa education system. This transition has provoked the scholarly community to investigate the potential factors behind it. The study employed a qualitative research design; the sample of the study included 30 research respondents consisting of heads of Madrassa, heads of school, students enrolled in Madrassa, and their parents in district Mohmand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Data was collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews and then analyzed thematically according to the qualitative research traditions. The findings of this study revealed a variety of causes behind the phenomenon of transition from school to the Madrassa education system. Among them, the geographical location served as a breeding ground for the mushrooming growth of Madrassas. Similarly, the historical religious tradition that has assimilated into

the social and cultural life of the people is identified as another cause. The perception of parents, especially mothers was also identified as another important determinant of the growing number of enrolments in the Madrassa education system.

Key Words: Mohmand, Madrassa, Transition, Dropout, Social values, Formal education

Introduction

In Pakistan, the societal fabric is interwoven with religious values, with Islam serving as the predominant faith within the region. This religious framework profoundly influences the inclusion and exclusion dynamics within the social domain. The principles and precepts of Islam not only inform individual behavior but also shape the norms, customs, and institutions that govern social interactions. Consequently, the religious ethos plays a decisive role in delineating the boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion, with adherence to Islamic teachings often serving as a primary determinant of societal acceptance and participation. Madrassa, a religious educational institution, holds a prominent position in the socialization of religious values, and moral teachings in various academic disciplines. These institutions are products of the socio-cultural and geographical realities of the societies. Thus, a growing number of students' enrollment in the Madrassa education system has been noticed in the recent past across the country, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Zafar (2022) describes that children predominantly enroll in Madrassas whose parents are economically unable to afford conventional schooling. Similarly, Houtsonen (1994) posits that financial limitations drive parents to opt for religious schools over modern educational institutions. The Madrassa system, largely reliant on charitable contributions from affluent community members, offers free food, clothing, and boarding along with free education. This attracts a large segment of poor children to receive cheaper education (Lacey & Benthall, 2014). Moreover, the geographic context plays a pivotal role in this educational transition, with Pashtun tribes inhabiting the northwest region of the country demonstrating a strong commitment to Islamic teachings and tribal customs.

Most commonly, the terms transfer and migration are used to characterize moving from one education system to another education system (Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000). However, Jindal-Snape (2016) defined the term transition as a process that is the combination of social, educational, and psychological adaptation that occurs as a learner moves from one education system to another. The majority of the learners conceptualized transition as a process of change due to peers and friends' influences, family background, and parental aspiration (Jackson & Scharman, 2002), various causes of this change across social settings including economic realities, social and cultural values, and religious motives (Galton & McLellan, 2017). Globalization, political instability, conflicts, poverty, and social inequality are the forces that are considered one of the main reasons to explain the wave of migration (Marshall, 2016; Diamond, 2000). The theory of pull and push factors helps us to explain the process of migration from one social context to another. In the present case, the application of the pull and push factor theory of Lee (1966) will provide useful information about the transition from school (social structure) to Madrassa (social structure) education in the North-Western region of Pakistan. According to the basic framework of pull and push factor theory, the transition from one social context to another is the result of a combination of factors that attract a person to leave (pull factors) and the reasons that force a person to a particular destination (push factors) (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977).

The basic factors involved in the transition phenomena are economic factors (Zafar, 2022), financial limitations (Houtsonen, 1994), free boarding and lodging (Lacey & Benthall, 2014), social and psychological adaptation (Jindal-Snape, 2016; Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000), peers, friends influences, family background and parental aspiration (Jackson & Scharman, 2002), economic realities, social and cultural values and religious motives (Galton & McLellan, 2017) and globalization, political instability, conflicts, poverty, and social inequality (Marshall, 2016; Diamond, 2000) from one educational system to another one.

The transition from one social system (formal education) to another social system (Madrassa education) is influenced by several factors including economic and financial limitations along with the availability of free lodging and boarding facilities. The key role of social and cultural values and psychological adaptation and the influences of peers and friends

also contribute to this transition process. Family background and parental aspirations have further impacted the decision-making process from one educational system to another of their children. Additionally, religious motives, globalization, political instability, conflicts, poverty, and social inequality are all the basic components that shape the transition between different educational systems.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing ratio of students dropping out from formal school is a sad state as reported by Dunya News (2024, March 7) that nearly 5 million school-age children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are found out of school. In those students, 3.67 million were recorded in settled areas and 1.61 million as 360,000 boys and 645,000 girls in Newly Merged Districts (NMDs). Similarly, in the North-West region of Pakistan, tribal district Mohmand, most of the students have quit completing their formal education and then joined the Madrassa education system. To find the factors of this drop outing is needed an in-depth investigation to recognize the phenomena. The outcome of the study can enable us to understand what are the main factors (pull and push) in this transition process from school to Madrassa Education, and how this transition affects society.

Research Objectives

1. To find out how the geographical positioning of a region influences the transition process between different educational systems.
2. To explore how the economic status of a society impacts the transition from one system of education to another system of education.
3. To evaluate the impact of social values on the transition process from one education system to another.
4. To examine who is the last decision maker of the educational-related matter of the child.
5. To investigate what are the positive and negative consequences of this educational transition on individuals and society as a whole.

Research Methodology

The study used a case study as a research methodology to explore the transition phenomena of students from formal school education to the Madrassa education system in district Mohmand. According to (Cohen et al., 2011) and Merriam (1988) case studies focus is on processes, context, and discovery to understand and interpret the educational settings and phenomena. More importantly, Qualitative case studies proved most suitable to study human perceptions and experiences critically.

In order to access the respondents for data collection, the researcher selected a total of thirty respondents including ten school and Madrassa heads, ten parents of the students who quit the school education for madrassa, and similarly ten students for this study and used a purposive sampling strategy. Three semi-structured interview schedules were designed, one for the heads of school and madrassa, another for parents, and similarly one for students participants of the current study. The data was analyzed thematically, and keeping all ethical considerations in mind as recommended (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings of the study

The findings of the study are divided into two main themes, the pull factors and the push factors. These two themes are further divided into subthemes. Details of each theme and subtheme are given below:

Pull Factors in the Transition to Madrassa Education System

All the respondents shared their perceptions and experiences relating to factors that attract students to religious education (Madrassa). When the respondents were asked about ‘what was their main motive to joining Madrassa education’, the response of the participants was recorded in the following sub-themes.

Religious Zeal

A significant number of respondents responded that they were mainly motivated by their religious zeal to get higher education in Madrassa.

“To enhance one's moral and spiritual life, getting the Madrassa education is important, as it is deeply rooted in our historical and cultural legacy” (Student-05).

“I chose to join the Madrassa because my mother wanted me to receive a religious education and share the teachings of Islam with the broader community” (Student-06).

One of the parents of Madrassa going students responded:

“As Muslims, it is our moral and religious duty to ensure our children receive a Madrassa education” (Parents-8).

The findings of this study revealed that the main rationale was based on the assumption that religious education is for after-world life and school-based education is for worldly gains. Based on these assumptions, it can be concluded that the main motive is religious zeal behind religious education.

Geographical Location

Mohmand district is situated near the Afghanistan border. This geographical position is one of the main reasons for religious education spread in the region. Some of the respondents have also labeled this contributor factor essential in this context.

A head of a madrassa responded in these words:

“Our geography, historical traditions, and anthropology are deeply interrelated with religion. Religion and our geography go similar, shaping our thoughts and behaviors” (Head of Madrassa-05).

One of the school heads responded:

“The Afghan-Pakistan border and the district of Mohmand is a key factor in this transition, driven by the Russian and American invasions of Afghanistan and their impact on the Mohmand region” (School Head-10).

The findings highlighted that geographical location plays an important role in the proliferation of religious education in regions that shape the sense of Muslim identity, and cultural and social norms of a community. Similarly, history, geography, and religion collectively frame the people's way of thought, behavior, and social interaction within their cultural contexts.

Cultural and Community Values

The trend of the transition from school to the Madrassa education system is influenced by the values that society attributes to each form of education. The findings of this study reveal that district Mohmand has valued Madrassa education more since the spread of Islam in this region.

“Being a religiously educated family, it's a tradition for us to enroll all our children in the Madrassa system. This is both a religious obligation and a valued practice in our society” (Parents-02).

One of the Madrassa heads further explained:

“Religious scholars are highly respected in our community, both in social and religious gatherings. This respect has elevated the role of Madrassa graduates, placing them at the forefront of social life” (Head of Madrassa-04).

The same perception was reflected in the views of the madrassa students. Their claim was based on the assumption that the Madrassa as a social institution is highly respected in society.

The data of the study concluded that enrolling children in the Madrassa education system is seen not only to fulfill a religious obligation but also as a continuation of cultural values in society. Further, it was also claimed by the respondents' views that Madrassa is a highly respected social institution in Mohmand society therefore parents preferred to enroll their children there.

Moral and Ethical Teaching

Most of the respondents emphasized that the moral and ethical reflections in Madrassa contribute key role in the transition process. As one of the heads of Madrassa Education said:

“The people of this region prefer religious education as its integral part of their socio-cultural fabric. Most parents bring their children to the Madrassa to educate them in the moral and ethical teachings of Islam” (Head of Madrassa-09).

Parents were asked the reasons behind sending their kids to Madrassa. According to them the main reason behind this transition is to protect children from social evils like drug taking or prevention from unethical and criminal activities. In this regard, one of the parents shared his views:

“Our primary concern is to protect our young generation from social evils, especially as our current social environment is increasingly affected by the misuse of cell phones and its negative impact on the youth. In my view, Madrassa education is the most effective way to address and control these issues” (Parents-06).

The result of the study showed that the negative effect of modern technology, particularly the misuse of cell phones is leading to a decline in moral and ethical standards among the young

generation. Therefore, for a protective measure to instill strong religious beliefs and moral values, the parents sent their children to Madrassa in district Mohmand.

Family Background

Family background, as an important pull factor in the transition process was noted by the respondents. The traditional family structure, closely associated with religious backgrounds, plays a central role in this transition. As one of the parents shared his views in this regard. He told:

“I have enrolled all my sons in Madrassa and I am also Madrassa educated. It is the tradition of our family to provide Madrassa education for both our males and females” (Parents-03).

One of the students responded:

“My father is a Madrassa educated person, and my older brothers are also enrolled in Madrassa because it is our family tradition to get religious education” (Student-07).

The data of the study revealed that a strong family tradition is prioritizing Madrassa education for both males and females which indicates a deep commitment of the people of district Mohmand to religious education. It also explored that due to the religious and family background of the family, children have been sent to the madrassa education system.

Specialized Curriculum

In the Madrassa education system, another pull factor was identified as the specialized curriculum that eventually attracted students towards Madrassa. For some respondents, this specialized nature of the Madrassa education system had great value.

“The education and curriculum of the Madrassa system are not focused solely on worldly matters. Instead, the value of religious education can be observed to perform in social and religious gatherings in our society” (Student-09).

Another student who left his school education and entered into Madrassa education system shared his views in this regard:

“People who receive their education in schools often achieve financial success and live comfortably. However, those who are religiously educated also lead satisfactory lives. Their religious education brings them contentment and enables them to play a positive role in their society” (Student-05).

The findings revealed that formal school education often leads to financial benefits and a comfortable lifestyle but on the other hand, religious education provides a different kind of satisfaction. Those who are religiously educated may not necessarily achieve the same level of material wealth, but they have satisfaction and spend happy and prosperous lives.

Push Factors in the Transition to Madrassa Education System.

Push factors include various cultural, social, demographical, and economic elements of social dynamics that contribute towards the transition from school to Madrassa. All these factors are identified and discussed as subthemes:

Current Condition of School Education System

One of the main reasons identified is the dissatisfaction of parents with the school education that forces them to enroll their kids in the Madrassa education system. In this regard, one of the students said:

“I attended school for five years, but my academic performance was not satisfactory due to the shortage of teachers in my school. My parents were not satisfied and they enrolled me in a nearby Madrassa” (Student-02).

One of the heads of Madrassa when he was asked, are you satisfied with the current school education system? In response, he said:

“In our Madrassa, we are provided free books, boarding facilities, and meals. The primary goal of this education is to promote the moral, ethical, and religious teachings of Islam, which are often not covered in school education. Many people are generally dissatisfied with the school education system, and due to this reason Madrassa education is highly valued” (Head of Madrassa-08).

However, some participants showed satisfaction with school education and they were in favor of benefiting from both types of education:

“As a university graduate with Madrassa education, and now teaching in public sector schools, I believe that school education is important for our young generation. It’s essential for their progress. I recommend that parents provide their children with both Madrassa and school education to ensure their overall development” (Parents-04).

The data of the study concluded that a well-rounded education both in Madrassa and school is important for the holistic development of the young generation. However, some parents are not

satisfied with the school education and argue that Madrassa education imports moral, ethical, and religious teachings of Islam, which are often not covered in school education and that is the reason, they enrolled their children in Madrassa.

Quality of Education

Quality of education is identified as another push factor that is responsible for the transition to the Madrassa education system. Most of the parents and heads of the Madrassa education system maintained their dissatisfaction with the quality of education at school. As one of the parents told:

“I decided to withdraw my sons from the nearby school due to inadequate facilities” (Parents-05).

He further added:

“The main issue with the school education was the shortage of teaching staff and a general sense of irresponsibility. As a result, many students were not learning effectively after a year at the school. Therefore, I decided to withdraw my sons and enroll them in a nearby Madrassa”

The result of the study highlighted some challenges within the school system, particularly the shortage of some basic facilities, teaching staff, and the lack of responsibility among some teachers in district Mohmand. Due to these reasons, some parents enrolled their young ones in Madrassa.

Peer and Social Influences

The transition from school to Madrassa education has been affected by social and peer influences. The company boys keep has a direct influence over their choice of diversion to Madrassa education. As one of the students shared his views in this regard:

“I accompanied a peer to the Madrassa because he was enrolling himself there, and due to my personal attachment to him, I also decided to enroll myself along with him in the nearby Madrassa education system” (Student-01).

When public sector school heads were asked to share their views regarding the role of peer pressure and social influences over the transition process from school to Madrassa, one of the school heads shared his views as follows:

“In my experience, some students left school education to join Madrassa education because their friends were enrolling there. Peer pressure is indeed a factor in this transition” (School Head-04).

The findings showed that peer influence plays a very important role in students' decisions to leave school and enroll in the Madrassa education system. Peer pressure and social influences as identified in this study as the main factors in the transition of students to leave one system of education and join another in district Mohmand.

Economic Factors

In the transition process, economic factors e.g., poverty was not the main cause. It is a general perception that the transition to Madrassa takes place due to poverty, but in this case, the research respondents negated this perception to a much greater extent. As one of the heads of the Madrassa education system shared his views:

“The economic conditions in our district are approximately stable, with all basic amenities for a normal life. However, the tradition of prioritizing religious education stems from a mindset shaped over centuries in this society, and due to this people's preference for religious education” (Head of Madrassa-09)

This stance was reinforced when the discussion was carried out with the students who were enrolled in the Madrassa education system. As one of the students told:

“Madrassa education is not getting for any economic benefits or solves issues like unemployment. Instead, it focuses on spiritual and moral uplifting. It is a valuable asset within our cultural and religious traditions” (Student- 08)

This study result clarified that the primary purpose of Madrassa education is not economic benefits or addressing unemployment but rather fostering the spiritual and moral development of the child. This form of education is highly valued for its role in preserving social, cultural, and traditional norms and enhancing the moral and religious fabric of society.

Sense of Muslim Identity

When the question of Muslim identity was placed before the respondents of this study, mainly heads of the Madrassa education system and parents most of them identified the Muslim identity as being their top priority that could be maintained through imparting Madrassa education to their young generation. As one of the heads of Madrassa shared his views:

“As a Muslim community, it is our religious responsibility to preserve our identity. This process of identity formation can be effectively achieved by enrolling our children in the Madrassa education system” (Head of Madrassa-05)

Some of the school heads shared their views as follows:

“The way to preserve our Muslim identity is through the religious education provided by the Madrassa system. This aspect is a key factor contributing to the transition process” (School Head-09).

The findings of the study revealed that maintaining and preserving the sense of Muslim identity is the top priority of the people of this region. It asserts that for the purpose of integrating religious teachings and cultural values, the people of district Mohmand enroll their children in the Madrassa education system.

Mother as a Main Decision Maker

The findings of the study show that mothers usually have a decisive role in choosing religious education for their children. This dominance was observed when fathers were dead or in foreign countries to earn a livelihood.

According to the research respondents, in most cases, it is the mother who plays a key role in the transition to Madrassa education for their children. As one of the students replied:

“My mother aspires for me to become a Hafi-e-Quran, and I fully support her goal. Although my father is uneducated and my mother has only received primary education, it was she who enrolled me in the Madrassa. My mother's aim was to I gain knowledge about Islam and share it with the wider community. I will do my utmost efforts to fulfill her wish” (Student-10).

Similarly, when another student who was enrolled in Madrassa for religious education, was asked to explain who had decided to enroll him in Madrassa, he said:

“It was my parents' decision to enroll me in the Madrassa in our village, with my mother playing the most significant role in making this choice. My father and brother supported her decision, and I am eager to receive Madrassa education. I look forward to becoming an Alim (a religious scholar) in the near future” (Student-3).

The data revealed that the decision to enroll children in Madrassa was primarily made by their mother, with support from their father and brother in district Mohmand. Furthermore, in traditional society, the strong role of the mother in the decision of a child's education is highlighted by the influence of family members especially the mother in educational choices.

Discussion

The study helps to enhance scholarship on the Madrassa education system and its growth in the tribal area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study was aimed to seek people's perceptions towards Madrassa education in district Mohmand. Through a qualitative case study, this research explored the phenomenon in real demographical and social contexts. This finding of the study is dug out by the experiences of the research respondents through the lens of pull and push factors of transition.

The participants' views revealed that the phenomenon of transition to the Madrassa education system is mainly driven by the religious sensitivity of the people living in the district Mohmand. The sensitivity is more pronounced in the uplifting of the spiritual life of the young generation by instilling Islamic social and moral values which are in close conformity with each other that supports the study findings of Galton, Morrison, and Pell (2000). The study further explored that Madrassa education is mainly valued for its spiritual and social recognition while economic benefits were not considered that much valuable. These findings assimilate with the findings of Galton and McLellan (2017) that religious motivation is one of the main factors and driving forces behind this transition process.

Another significant contribution of this study which is revealed by the respondents' perceptions is the recognition of geographical location to determine religious education importance. Most of the previous studies on the phenomenon of the role of the Madrassa education system in the Muslim world focused on the curriculum, teachers' role, and its role in the political system of a society (e.g., Marshall, 2016). This study focused on the Madrassa system from a different angle that is the transition from school to the Madrassa education system. The findings of this study confirm that the geographical location of this district has wider implications for the understanding of Madrassa education and its proliferation. Thus, the combination of religious sentiments, social and cultural values of a society, and geography location are the key factors as found by the study of Diamond (2000) that make attractive the Madrassa education in the minds of people.

Further, the data revealed by Jindal-Snape (2016) is conscience with the finding of the present study that cultural systems also played a basic role in this proliferation thus causing this transition, where the value system that is developed over the period of centuries, anthropological

and historical legacies; and the most important among those legacies are the protection of the moral and religious traditions of the Mohmand society. The study found that it is the Madrassa education system which is run by non-governmental funds from the local community which supports the study of Lacey and Benthall (2014), as the only socially and culturally recognized educational institution in the perception of the people of this district. As when it comes to morality, good behavior, and character building it is only Madrassa that is considered the right institution.

The study conducted by Zafar (2022) and Houtsonen (1994) disagrees with this study that the economic conditions influence the educational trajectory of children, particularly in the case of transition from the school system to the Madrassa education system. Contrary to the assumption that lower economic status drives this transition, the study concluded that economic factors are not the primary determinant. The results of this study highlighted that the religious zeal of the people in the area significantly overshadows economic considerations. Even families with substantial economic resources enroll their children in Madrassa education to align their behavior and thinking with Islamic teachings. These findings emphasize that religion is the most valued social asset in district Mohmand.

Similarly, answering the question that who makes the decision about children's educational careers, it was found that it is the mother who makes educationally related decisions for their children and in this case enrolls their sons and daughters in the Madrassa education system. The findings of the study resemble the study results of Jackson and Scharman (2002), who stated that in the traditional social setting, a mother can make some vital decisions as far as the educational trajectories of her offspring are concerned. This finding has significant implications for the role of women in the traditional society of district Mohmand.

Every study on research-based has some shortcomings. Similarly, the present study may not be excluded. The researcher interviewed thirty participants which seems not sufficient. If the participants were sixty, the results of the current study would be more informative. Moreover, instead of a qualitative approach if the researcher used a mixed method approach then the data would be used for the generalization of the study. Furthermore, as a novice researcher and the lack of research tradition in district Mohmand is also the cause of imperfection in this regard.

Conclusion

The viewpoints of the heads of school and Madrassa revealed that the transition from formal schools to Madrassa education in district Mohmand is mostly noted by religious zeal, cultural values, and Islamic education that are promoted by strong societal support. They further explored that Madrassa education focuses on the religious, moral, and ethical development of the individual while school education is valued for social and economic reasons. In this regard findings from the parents' views were concluded that religious education is a means to protect children from social evils. Moreover, the religious educated person (Mullah) is a respected personality in their society; therefore they enrolled their children in Madrassas. Peers' influence, family background, and the impacts of religious zeal were also noted by them in this transition process. Similarly, the students' views concluded that some students plan to return to the formal education system after completing their Madrassa education to get a modern education for attractive jobs and business to fulfill personal and family expectations.

Therefore, the study offers well-grounded and empirical suggestions for the educational career of children in district Mohmand. This study recommends that:

1. In order to improve the quality of Madrassa education, wealthy people should be motivated to have financial contributions in Madrassas.
2. Madrassa may be used as a supplementary education system in the evening time to educate the young ones of the society in basic Islamic teachings.
3. The public education sector should be improved so that along with Madrassa education, people can also send their children to schools.
4. Vocational training programs should be started for Madrassa students to control the issues of unemployment and social disengagement.
5. Peers and friends relationships should be encouraged among the Madrassa and formal school students for a positive and supportive learning environment.

The present study highlighted the need for further research in the following areas: as this study identified mother as one of the most important figure in sending their children to Madrassa education, therefore, it is recommended that mothers' views and perceptions be explored in future researchers in the district Mohmand.

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