

How do School and Family Matter? Exploring Success Stories of Students from Underprivileged Families

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ABSTRACT

The current research aimed to explore the success stories of secondary and higher secondary school students with low socioeconomic status. The population comprised of all the top position holder students in the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Sahiwal who secured first, second, or third position during the last five years. Thirteen position holders with low socioeconomic status were selected purposively for gathering the data through semi structured interviews. Narrative Ethnography was employed as a qualitative approach to execute the study. The data was collected, transcribed, coded, categorized, and themes were generated. The study determined that family, schoolteacher's support and motivation, scholarships along with fee concession helped a lot of these students to win the position in BISE. It is recommended that parents with low socioeconomic status should be provided jobs and financial support for the education of their top position holder students and students should be given more scholarships and fee concessions.

Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of societal progress and individual empowerment and plays a critical role in shaping the future of individuals and communities. However, not all students have equal access to the resources and support necessary for academic success. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face major challenges that can hinder their educational success. The interaction between the school environment and family dynamics can greatly influence these students' academic careers. The aim of this research is to examine the complex relationship between school and family support and its impact on the academic success of students from disadvantaged families.

Numerous studies have highlighted the significant differences in educational outcomes between students from low-income backgrounds and their more privileged peers (Reardon, 2011; Sirin, 2005). Disadvantaged students often struggle with limited access to educational resources, inadequate facilities, and suboptimal learning environments (Lee & Burkam, 2003). These challenges can lead to lower academic performance, reduced motivation, and limited opportunities after college (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995).

The role of schools in mitigating the effects of socioeconomic inequalities is crucial. Schools can act as equalizers by providing access to quality education, resources, and support services (Rumberger, 2011). Effective school policies and practices can create an environment conducive to learning and help disadvantaged students overcome barriers and succeed academically (Borman & Overman, 2004). However, the influence of family dynamics on academic success cannot be overlooked. Family commitment, support, and involvement play a critical role in shaping students' attitudes towards education and their overall academic performance (Desimone, 1999; Epstein, 2001). Families can provide emotional support, create a conducive home learning environment, and instill values that foster educational aspirations (Catsambis, 2001).

The interaction between school and family support is complex and closely intertwined. Schools that actively involve families and recognize their role in students' education tend to achieve better academic outcomes (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Collaborative efforts between schools and families can remove barriers to success and create a more holistic support system for disadvantaged underprivileged students.

Research Questions

- How does the school contribute to the academic success of secondary and higher secondary school students from underprivileged families?
- How does the underprivileged family contribute to the academic success of secondary and higher secondary school students?

Research design

The current study employed narrative ethnography to better understand the research problems and answer the research questions. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The method of studying stories and their actual connection with storytellers and experiences is known as narrative ethnography. It was more specifically addressed by the process, technique, and analysis that focused on a detailed examination of social circumstances, actors, and actions in connection to narratives. Direct and in-depth observations of the research area were included in this approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

The population of the study comprised of all position holders of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) level students in BISE Sahiwal in the Sahiwal division. A sample of SSC and HSSC position holders was selected in BISE Sahiwal in the Sahiwal division during the last five years (2016-2020). There were 56 SSC position holders and 118 HSSC. There were 174 position holders in number according to statistical data of BISE Sahiwal (2016-2020). Thirteen position holders, both male and female students of SSC and HSSC level of BISE Sahiwal in the Sahiwal division belonging to low socioeconomic status were selected by purposive sampling technique. Information regarding the father's profession, family income, and locality was taken from

the participants and was also verified by the students over the phone before conducting the interviews. The participants' characteristics are given in table 1 below.

Table: 1.

Pseudonym	Age	M/F	Class	Locality	Father's Profession	Father's income (Rs)
P-1	20	F	HSSC/ 1 st Arts	Village	Farmer.	10000/
P-2	19	F	HSSC/ 1 st Pre Eng.	Village	Laborer.	10000-15000/
P-3	19s	M	HSSC/ 3 rd ICS	Village	Laborer.	10000
P-4	21	M	HSSC/1 st PreMedical	Village	Farmer.	18000-20000/
P-5	22	M	HSSC/1 st Humanities	Village	Shopkeeper	10000/
P-6	23	M	HSSC/1 st Commerce	District	Carpenter.	18000-20000/.
P-7	23	M	HSSC/ 3 rd Commerce	District Head	Laborer.	18000/
P-8	22	M	HSSC/1 st Arts	Village	Laborer.	20000
P-9	19	M	SSC/ 1 st Arts	Village	Business	20000/
P-10	15	M	SSC/3 rd Arts	Village	Laborer.	10000/
P-11	15	M	SSC/ 1 st Science	District	Laborer.	15000/
P-12	18	M	SSC/3 rd Arts	Village	Farmer	15000/
P-13	19	M	HSSC/1 st Arts	Village	Farmer	10000/

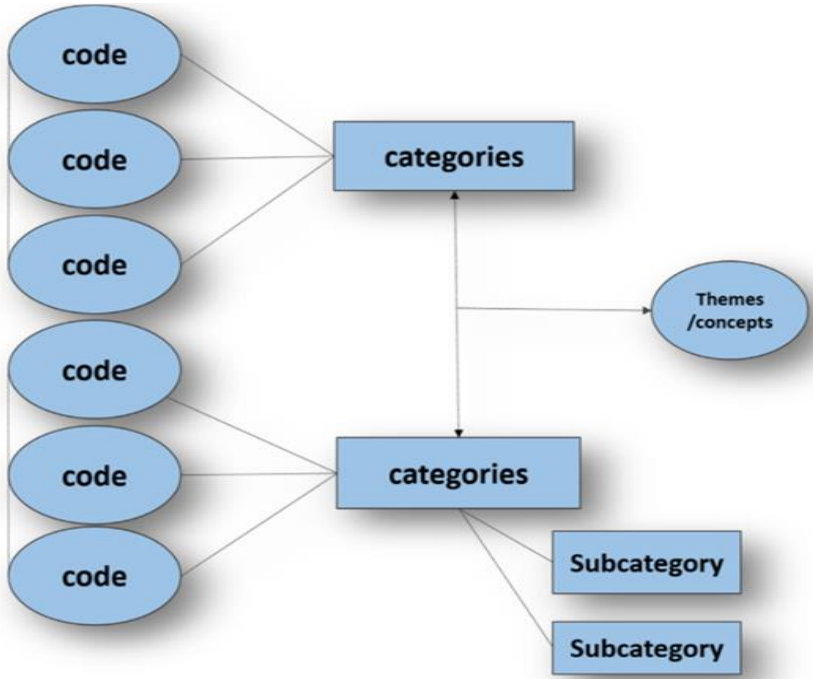
Data Collection and Analysis

Most participants were students and studying at government and private institutes in local and big cities of the country, semi-structured interviews were conducted at a venue, time, and date of their own choice, subject to their convenience and availability. The time span of interviews was approximately one hour and were conducted in Urdu (Pakistan's national language). Interviews were then recorded by using an android smart phone VIVO-S-1 that was purchased for this project. The data was saved under personal self-generated code for mobile and interview files.

The data was manually examined by the creation of codes, groups, and themes. Codes are devices that let researchers reflect in new ways by concisely telling the condensed meaning units. It facilitates the discovery of relationships between meaning units. The next stage is to group codes into categories in order to answer queries, such as who, what, when, and where. This can be accomplished by comparing and evaluating the codes to determine which codes appear to belong together to make a category. The names of categories are usually short and based on facts (Erlingsson et al., 2017).

The researchers used the following rules for data analysis set out by (Saldana, 2021). After the developed the transcriptions of the interviews, code and categories should be created and then patterns should be looked for. All research questions were formulated from the data collected by the researcher to perform analysis. The researcher deeply considered the major events and incidents that occurred during the data collection process from the interviewee's attitude towards providing the interview to their feelings, by narrating a particular incident. The researcher attempted to know about the implications of the stories collected by using different methods of analysis.

The procedure used to analyze the data is shown in the following figure.



Themes/concepts Model for Qualitative Inquiry (Saldana, 2021, p. 12).

Results

The analysis of the interview transcriptions reflected many concerns of the interviewees. Resultantly, the emerging themes included family support, fees and scholarship, teacher support, and motivation. The description of each theme is given below as:

Family support

It was discovered that parental involvement in a child's education consistently shows a positive correlation with the child's academic success (Topor et al., 2010). The most important factor in a child's academic success, above all other factors, is the parent's involvement in their education (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017). Position holders in the current study described the support and financial assistance their parents provided to enable them to excel at high and higher secondary school levels. According to participant one (P-1), she was an obedient and submissive daughter, and her parents were equally supportive and encouraging, however, her mother was a little bit rigid in her self-made norms. She reflected that:

My parents helped me financially and gave me the freedom to pursue my education as far as I wanted to. Due to their strict self-made rules, my mother sometimes disagreed with my father's arguments. My brother has always supported me and convinced my parents that I should pursue my studies.

The parents of participant two (P-2), were both illiterate and lived in a remote area. For them, joint family system has been problematic for a very long time. Despite this, she has always maintained a positive approach and focused on her studies, even though she was dealing with a lot of problems at home. The P-2 described that:

My parents supported me and permitted me to enroll in a private school. The family's financial condition was quite hard but they understood the value of female education and its impact on family and society. Along with my aunt, my mother has always played a supporting role in all aspects of my life.

Similarly, participant three (P-3) was facing financial hardships and was the eldest of three brothers who lived in rural areas. His mother passed away unexpectedly due to untreated asthma two years before. Father had no regular source of income except a small piece of land, and a few cattle to look after and sell their milk. He narrated that:

Mother always encouraged and motivated me. When I was in eighth grade, she passed away. Father constantly encouraged me and remained ready to sell his cattle to help me pay for my studies. My uncle gave me financial assistance as well since he thought I was moving in the right direction. Although my mother was not present in this world; my maternal family has a soft corner about me.

Participant four (P-4), Hafiz-e- Quran and the eldest of his three brothers firmly believed in Almighty Allah. He had a very cool, calm, and submissive personality with no friends at all and remained busy in his studies. He stated that, “*My father gave me financial help following the culture of the country. My mother regularly administered assessments and helped me prepare my art subjects. She spared a room in her house just for me to study there in peace.*” Similarly, participant five (P-5) was ranked second in the family of his six members. His elder brother was a position holder in BISE Sahiwal in the Sahiwal division. P-5 remarked that, “*My father had a shop in my village and income from that shop was utilized to meet daily expenses of life*”. His Dubai-based uncle also provided them with financial assistance and sent them PKR 2000/- each month. This amount was used as “*pocket money for kids who attended school.*”

Participant Six (P-6), the only male child, believed that emotional stability was crucial to succeed in life. His father was an untrained laborer who was not educated however, his mother had a degree and worked as a teacher before getting married. She helped him with grooming. He described his experience of support from the family as:

A child will not succeed in life if his parents did not support him from the start. My parents gave me financial assistance and took my education seriously. My mother often questioned me about my studies, examinations, and final grades. I provided her with all updates regularly and on time. It matters a lot for a student that all are known by his parents. My parents often directed me to sit alone and give some time for studying. For students, a quiet and calm setting is important. My sister also supported me academically.

The goal of participant seven (P-7) was to succeed in business. He changed his track and joined the HSS classes as an I.Com student after receiving average marks in SSC with science subjects. Each was quite new. On hearing one of his teachers that “you can do everything” a desire developed in him to move forward in his life. He reflected that:

My parents and relatives gave me a lot of support, guidance, and motivation. My parents supported me academically by paying my entire fee at every stage. I received assistance with the subject selection at the HSS level and tips on how to win a position in BISE from one of my cousins who had won a position in BISE.

Participant eight (P-8) attended a private college run by a welfare Islamic Religious Organization. His father expressed dissatisfaction with his results and realized his lack of interest in his studies when he performed extremely poor in the SSC exams. He elaborated that,

His father got him to an HSS after recommending further study. His father helped him financially by covering all his school fees and boarding costs, while simultaneously managing a large family and offering educational opportunities to other family members.

Participant ten (P-10) strongly believed that education is the only way through which his family may overcome this financial crisis. His father worked as a laborer, and life for his family was quite challenging. He attended a government school, where the fee was lower, that is, PKR 20 per month. Books in that school was provided free of cost and, he had to go to school daily on foot. His father constantly provided him with financial help. His father and an older sibling often gave him advice to stay focused on his studies. His elder sister and brother were always there for him. Without asking, anyone pitched in to assist. His mother stayed available to help him both academically and generally. Participant thirteen (P-13), belonged to a distant region where destitute people were constantly cut off from essentials. His father did not earn a consistent living. Along with his parents, he worked in the fields for sporadic pay. He reflected that:

Despite our poor financial condition, my father let me enroll in school and provided financial support for me. When I needed it, my elder brothers also assisted me. Mother washed my clothes and made my meal daily. All my family members encouraged me to pursue education and made it a top priority.

The theme of family support depicts that high and higher secondary school students belonged to poor families, however, their parents and other family members along with their near relatives supported them financially, academically, and morally. This support led them to succeed in their lives and made them win a top position in BISE examinations.

Fee and Scholarship

Scholarships are awarded to students based on the values and goals decided by the donors or funding agency. Research found that if scholarships were granted to students with low socioeconomic status, their academic performance would increase by 87% (Omeje & Abugu, 2015). According to Ramirez (2012), research that examined the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) impact on migrant students at California State University determined that CAMP students outperformed the other groups in terms of academic achievement. The position holders in the current study explained how financial assistance and fee concession aided their academic success at SSC and HSS levels.

Participant two (P-2), spoke on the function of fee concessions and scholarships in detail along with their importance, especially for students. Pre-classes were free, and The Punjab Educational Endowment Fund (PEEF) scholarship helped to overcome the problem of

commuting costs. She was also provided a scholarship from the college of PKR 2100 and had all of her fees waived. The annual fee was only PKR 10. Participant three (P-3) remarked that, “*all relatives were continuously pressuring his father to stop studying to next grade, education up to SSC level was enough since he did not have enough money for spending on her education*”. One of his cousins was studying in a public sector university at the Department of Mathematics and he was motivated by him. He explained him that, while “*he was interested in joining a local institute, he cannot afford the fee and he instructed to go there and know all about the admission process and fees.*” He further elaborated that:

I went there and learned that there will be free education for pre-class students if they score 90% marks in the SSC exams. I joined pre-classes and was subsequently selected for free education in the ICS class, where students needed to pay PKR 10 only each year. I received a PEEF scholarship that I used to pay for other expenses related to education.

Participant four (P-4), Hafiz-e-Quran, and the younger child of his family who obtained first position among the pre-medical group reflected that his “*fees was at a minimum stage PKR 10 per year additionally and was awarded a scholarship amounting to PKR 2000 annually*”. At HSS level, he was recognized as a “*hardworking student who could secure good marks*”. Participant five (P-5) reflected that, “*his second-year fee was not charged by the school and was instructed by the teachers to keep his focus on his studies only*”. While discussing fee and scholarships participant six (P-6) spoke on the “*role of free education and scholarships in his life*” as:

I paid my fee up to class sixth. My seventh and eighth-grade fee was waived by the school administration because of my good academic performance there. Along with PEEF scholarships, my HSS level education was free costing only PKR 10 per year.

While discussing fee concession participant eight (P-8), a student of a religious-based Islamic welfare foundation school added that, “*his father was a poor man and was unable to pay the expenditures of his seven children’s education*”. In regards to my “*fee concession*,” he spoke with the principal. He explained, “*we shall keep an eye on his improvement. If he had been a hardworking student he would get significant relief in the fee.*” They did not impose any fee for the first month. Additionally, they greatly relaxed his fee for the upcoming months.

According to the experiences and descriptions of participants’ stories, the fee discount and scholarships were found to be a great help for them in order to achieve the highest positions in the board examinations and they found it helpful.

Teachers’ Support and Motivation

Academic motivation acts as a driving force behind students’ motivation to learn. According to the findings of a study conducted by Gupta & Mili (2017), there is a significant positive relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement. There is a significant difference in academic motivation between high and low achievers. However, there is a significant gender difference between low achievers concerning their academic achievement. The results of another study conducted by Afzal et al., (2010), explained that students’ motivation, either extrinsic or intrinsic, both has a positive impact

on their academic performance. The current study also explained how students' motivation is an essential component of their success.

According to Bhatnagar & Gupta (1999), guidance is a process of assisting the individual in finding answers to his/her problems and accepting responsibility for them. Guidance is an essential component of education; continuous service including both generalized and specialized service, for the child as a "whole" and not only for any one aspect of personality. In another study conducted by Ch (2006) to examine the effect of guidance services on students, it was found that guidance services have a significant effect on students' academic success, study habits, and study attitudes.

According to Nasreen & Naz (2013), the teaching style of teachers should be according to the present day and flexible, in order to make students work to the best of their abilities. The way a teacher interacts with a student determines how interested they become in particular subjects which directly affect their grades. The position holders in the current study described how, at SSC and HSS levels; they were motivated, guided, and taught in a particular way so that it became possible for them to win the position. Participant one (P-1) narrated about motivation, guidance, and teaching style of teachers as:

When I was a tenth-grade student, teachers motivated me to get the position in BISE, but unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in doing so. When I joined the same school for inter-classes, I began working hard. Teachers helped me and inspired me to get a position in BISE. My principal inspired me as well.

Participant two (P-2) remarked that she attended a private school. In the area where she lived, there was not a single public school. Her parents were illiterate, and each form of guidance and motivation was school-based. She had a strong desire to become "prominent and important" and reflected that:

I was guided, motivated, and encouraged by my teachers when I got good marks in the SSC examination. My personality was groomed at the school and academic achievement became possible through motivation, guidance, and adopting different teaching styles with the use of different colored markers by the teachers.

Participant three (P-3), an elder child of his family, spoke about the teacher's guidance, motivation, and teaching style as, "when I mentioned my "achieved marks" in the SSC part first examination, the class teacher took me to the principal office and informed him that this boy was telling a lie". The principal validated his outcome by checking it. "They included me in the school's group of talented students". He further elaborated that:

They kept me on a tight schedule while directing, inspiring, and teaching me. This also happened in ICS classes. I was inspired by looking at my name and picture on the prospectus pages and flexes. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods that directed and inspired me, and this help me to succeed.

Participant four (P-4), elder among his three brothers, always made his study timetable according to the prayer timings. He argued over the guidance, motivation, and teaching style of his teachers, saying that "each of his science teachers has his own teaching style that appeals to him greatly. How to create a diagram and label it, work out Math problems,

and learn Biology and Chemistry by heart.” Teachers at school, who greatly helped him in completing his F.Sc. taught him all this. They inspired, helped, and guided him in new, different, changing, and eye-catching ways.

Participant five (P-5) recalled how he was contacted by one of his school teachers one day while he was standing in front of his school building. He was approached by one of his school teachers who informed him that “*students like you became position holders in BISE.*” He humbly remarked, “*Sir, I only received a second division in the SSC examination with only 621 marks. How I can hold a position in BISE?*” After a few months of study, my teacher called me again and repeated his previous statement then, “*I seriously considered it, and preparation for holding the position started. In a traditional style of teaching, teachers used guidance and motivation quite frequently.*”

Participant six (P-6), was the only son of his parents. He was very much interested to become an officer and liked nice dressings. He chose I. Com over science on the advice of a wise man. He remarked that:

The science track was switched to the commerce track. At I. Com competent teachers inspired and influenced me. Teachers used a variety of teaching skills and tried to re-produce a lesson efficiently. Additionally, the institute taught presentation skills, which greatly assisted me in earning good grades and securing a position in BISE.

Participant seven (P-7) was very much interested in becoming a “successful businessman”. He was an average student who consistently earned “around 70% marks” in all of his exams up to SSC. Science-related subjects held no interest for him. According to his teachers, he was “an average student”. He chose to join I. Com because he was interested in business. He explained that:

After joining I. Com classes, I soon realized I have been reached the right place. Competent teachers guided, motivated, and taught me very well by using their qualifications, natural talent, skills, and experience. They motivated slowly while ignoring the mistakes and highlighting the qualities. One day one of the teachers said to me “you have a spark and you can win the position in BISE.

Participant eight (P-8) member of a large family obtained a “second division” and passed his SSC examination from a local government school run by a religious welfare organization. His teachers were competent and had a missionary attitude. Moreover, they were always ready to provide guidance and motivation to their students. They used to invite former position holders to “guide, motivate, teach, and share their experiences with students”.

Participant eleven (P-11) described himself as a government school student who was “guided, motivated, and directed by the highly skilled teachers and a headmaster”. Despite coming from a rural background, he had a strong desire for education. Participant thirteen (P-13) worked according to his self-made guidelines remarked that *his school was running under quite a professional team. Teachers received training in counseling, motivating, and used these instructional techniques in classes. With their assistance, he was able to win the position in BISE. School was his second home.* Participant twelve (P-12) rated the teachers as very much committed to his job, motivating, guiding, and trained in his teaching. “*He could not succeed without them*”.

Findings and Discussion

Support from parents and family plays an important role for position holders. Without their parent's help and other family members, students cannot win positions in BISE. Their performance was greatly aided by fee concession and scholarships, especially at higher secondary school level. They were able to attend school free of cost and their needs, including traveling expenses, were fulfilled by PEEF scholarship. Position holders' performance also depends heavily on the support and motivation of their teachers in a variety of ways including guidance, motivation, financial support, and use of various instructional techniques.

Pakistan is an Islamic republic country with a population of about 220 million people and a land area of 796095 square km. Under certain safety reasons and collective workability, most people prefer to live in tribes, families, and groups. Most people in the country are still living in villages. According to local customs, a father is the family's head. He is responsible for fulfilling the needs of his family, ensuring their safety, and overseeing all other aspects of their lives including marriages and other social activities as well. Since other extended families lived close to each other they also became helpful to them when needed. Family systems have significant relations with the academic achievements of students. The role of parents is more influential than the other members of the family (Bilal et al., 2013). Among all the work as well as the academic success of a child, the keyword is the parent's involvement in education (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017). According to one of the findings, parents and family support played an important role for students to obtain good positions in BISE.

Students' academic success is greatly influenced by their family's stable socioeconomic conditions in many ways (Saifi et al., 2011). It was found that socioeconomic conditions have an impact on academic achievement and with higher socioeconomic status individuals perform well (Ahmar et al., 2013). The results demonstrated a robust and favorable relationship between students' academic success and SES (Shah et al., 2012). Since poverty affects most Pakistanis, it also affects their families which harms their children's academic achievement. Such students hoped to win scholarships to pay their school fees. Government schools charge relatively little, but private schools charge extremely high. Students worked hard to achieve a set percentage of marks to get fee concessions and win scholarships, which greatly helped them to overcome their financial issues. Due to the bigger cost discounts and scholarships offered by private schools, many students chose them (Nayab et al., 2015).

According to Kirmani and Siddiquah (2008), amenities like scholarships, libraries and financial assistance (fee concession and stipend) have a positive impact on the academic success of students pursuing higher education. However, students rated the scholarship as the highest followed by other facilities like library access, and financial support (fee concession and stipend) offered by the institute. Most of the students informed the researchers that the scholarships and complete fee discounts granted by the institute based on their academic success in the proceeding class made it possible for them to get their education and attain a position in BISE.

The assistance of the teachers is crucial for students' academic success. The position of teacher may be divided into different categories, such as educator, motivator, and presenter. Most of the students valued the teachers' jobs. Their academic achievement was made possible by his teaching, motivation, and effective presentation (Charlton et al., 2020; Dinh et al., 2021; Kloos et al., 2022). It was found in a study conducted by Ökmen and Kilic

(2016), there is a meaningful and positive relationship between success and approach. Additionally, according to statistics, the way English instructors teach other languages affects how well they do on the TEOG test.

Teachers also had a significant role in motivating students, and most students acknowledged this. It was concluded in a study conducted by Silva et al., (2007) that the grade point average, which is essential for academic success, was connected to the motivation and anxiety of college students. College students' motivation served a meditational role in the relationship between their anxiety and grade point averages.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the analysis, it was concluded that most of the students remarked positively about their families' ability to assist them. Most position holders reported that they were incredibly supported by their families and parents. Most position holders acknowledged the significance of fee concession, scholarships, and teacher's assistance (guidance, motivation, and teaching skills). For them, particularly at the HSS level, financial aid in the form of fee concessions and scholarships remained crucial. Without them, they would not have been able to continue their education. Their success was greatly aided by the backing of the teachers, particularly at private HSS.

The supporting role of parents and families should be strengthened since it continues to be very much important in students' lives. To help parents and family members the state should provide jobs to them so that they can support their children more frequently. There are various facets to the teacher's responsibility, which cannot be overlooked at any institution. To achieve success for both public and private schools in the country, teachers must get specialized training to fulfill their roles effectively under the supervision of some regulatory body for evaluations to get good results.

The students were able to continue their education and achieve success in BISE, particularly, in private institutes at the HSS level due to fee concessions and scholarships. Only a few students can avail of this facility since it is based on a very high target. Government should make the appropriate provisions to enable this option for more and more students at public and private schools. The private sector should be urged to continue positively in this aspect as well. Religious scholars need to stress the value of investing in education from a religious perspective.

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