

Causes and Prevention of Dropouts of Students in Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta

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Abstract

Education is an essential facet of any country's development, which can have a direct influence on the growth, development, and progress of its citizens. A cause for concern in this study is that education is a key factor in any country's growth & development. The incapability to complete the academic program leads to negative impacts on the students' lives in terms of prospects and overall development. Therefore, it has to be investigated the main dropout reasons in the country as well as the implementing strategies to overcome these issues. Regrettably, the dropout rate of students at higher secondary levels is higher, especially in the Quetta City of Pakistan, as most of the students are unable to continue their higher studies. So, the current study aimed to examine the causes and prevention plans in terms of teachers' perceptions at higher secondary levels in Quetta City. The data was collected from 78 teachers from higher secondary schools with the help of 20 questions using a 5-point Likert scale. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and the chi-square method, with the help of the 'Statistical Package of Social Sciences' (SPSS) software. Multiple reasons have been found for dropout at higher secondary levels including lack of community support, socio-economic factors, absence of extra co-curricular activities, family-related issues, a weak relationship between teachers & students, teacher absences, and most importantly the school has no concern regarding these issues. Furthermore, these higher secondary schools don't have any prevention plans for that. Although multiple NGOs, UNICEF (ALP), and other organizations are working on this issue, there is still no single prevention plan for dropouts. The study also attempted to identify geographic and societal factors contributing to the high dropout rate and suggest practical solutions. Recommendations; Raising awareness about the issue of school dropouts and prevention strategies is crucial among parents, teachers, stakeholders, and heads of educational institutions in Quetta's higher secondary schools to decrease the dropout rate and related prevention strategies.

Key Words: Dropout, higher secondary school, students, causes, prevention, Quetta.

Introduction

Any country's growth depends heavily on education. With the aid of education, the completely advanced world reaches its pinnacle of advancement. Education supports people to turn out to be more conscious of their environments and themselves, whereas it also helps in enhancing their skills. Unfortunately, students in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, particularly in the district of Quetta, abandon school at the Higher Secondary level without finishing their education (Shah et al., 2023; Kakar et al., 2021). The study's primary goal is to investigate the major reasons why students in Quetta City drop out of Higher Secondary School (HSS). The challenges Pakistan is experiencing as the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a conclusion are unparalleled. The future of Pakistanis is uncertain due to the global economic downturn, global competitiveness, outsourcing, and the drastic collapse of the Pakistani economy, especially when the state is on the edge of fetching bankruptcy. Demand for educated, tech-savvy workers has never been higher, but many of Pakistan's schools continue to have an unacceptable high dropout rate, undermining this need.

On the provincial level, Balochistan, the least populated and unfocused province in terms of education, has been witnessing the highest dropout of students each year. Given the scanty resources of the state to meet the basic amenities of its populace, people are forced to manual labor. Therefore, they require more hands to make both ends meet, as such, they prefer for their children either businesses or any other skill or work as a profession. This is the very outlook of Balochistan in general, and that of Quetta city in particular (Shah et al., 2023; Zafar, 2016). Quetta is the enlightening hub of the province 'Balochistan' and individuals from all regions of Balochistan enroll their children in the Government & Private Schools of Quetta city. Given the multicultural composition of society in Quetta including Baloch, Pashtoon, Hazara Community, Saraiki, and Urdu Speaking and people after having experienced the flood catastrophes and the effects of the worldwide pandemic of Covid-19, face acute financial crisis and homelessness as the financial position of the majority of the Balochistan population is dependent on Government Jobs, farming, small businesses, and home-based industries, In such chaotic circumstances, they have been naturally rendered helpless to even afford the expenses of Government Schools. Incessant dropout of students of Higher Secondary level even at Government Schools of Quetta City is the dilemma of today's education in Balochistan in general, and that of Quetta City in particular.

Besides social, economic, and other aforementioned barriers, dropout of students of HSSs of Quetta City is also mainly due to incompatible teacher-student relationships and the least career counseling, encouragement, societal help, etc.

Literature Review

The term "student dropout" refers to a situation in which a student leaves school before completing their educational program (Fortin et al., 2006). Various reasons and factors can contribute to students dropping out of school (Long & Noor, 2023), which is a growing concern in international research, as they affect students from diverse cultural backgrounds, those facing family issues, developmental obstacles, and health disabilities (Winnie & Muchesia, 2023; Winzer et al., 2000). Among them poverty is a significant contributor to dropout rates, as research has shown that it is a key factor in students leaving school early at higher educational levels (see also Wild et al., 2023; Kakar et al., 2021; Lucky, 2011). Students from poor economic families have more chances of drop out than students belonging to wealthy backgrounds (Saghir, 2022; Kakar et al., 2021; Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Extensive research has been conducted on the complex and multifaceted issue of students dropping out from their school, both in printed & electronic forms. Different researchers have identified various causes of student dropout, including problematic behavior (Christle et al., 2007; Balfanz & Legters, 2004), lengthy subjects studied in secondary school (Paksi et al., 2023), anti-social peer relations (Lucky, 2011; Bradshaw et al., 2008), and economic factors such as low income levels and poverty (Parreño, 2023; Wild et al., 2023; Kakar et al., 2021). Other factors such as the education of females, teacher training, and exam patterns have also been identified as contributing to high dropout rates (Mughal & Aldridge, 2017; Sultana, 2017; Farooq, 1948).

According to Kakar et al. (2021), the Act 'No Child Left Behind' of 2001 has been a catalyst for improving education in the early 2000s. Though, due to the high dropout rates of students at higher secondary levels, achieving its objectives has been challenging. From a different viewpoint, this dropout issue from schools can be simply understood by Maslow's theory of need, where basic human needs are decisive for operative learning. This principle is also applicable to students, when a student is dealing with hunger, homelessness, or fear, then the school has become a low priority that causes students to drop out of school. Therefore, impoverished families who struggle to meet their basic needs cannot have motivation for education, as their primary apprehension is securing their daily needs. Consequently, these families may lack the emotional and material support necessary for their children to be effective in school (see also Paksi et al., 2023; Wild et al., 2023). Due to poverty students cannot buy their school uniforms, may not establish good relationships with their peers & teachers, and hence affect their school attendance (Winnie & Muchesia, 2023; Kakar et al., 2021; Lucky, 2011).

However, research conducted by Kumar et al. (2023) indicated that dropout rates are more prevalent among individuals from lower social and economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, different aspects such as the involvement of parents, a mother's education, teachers' attitude, sports participation, and having positive role models have been found to decrease the likelihood of dropout. On the other hand, engagement in different paid work, gender discrimination against girls, and involvement in multiple activities such as substance abuse (especially boys) are mostly risk factors for students dropping out of school. Furthermore, having no or limited interest in education and other familial reasons have also been identified as contributing to dropout (see also Parreño, 2023; Saghir, 2022). Addressing this issue requires improving the socio-economic status of families, enhancing government incentives for education, providing suitable job opportunities for boys & girls after completing their schooling, and increasing awareness of the importance of education.

There are negative consequences of students' HSS dropout, not just for the individual student, but for their family, society, & community as a whole. Studies have shown that dropouts often experience under-employment which leads to lower quality of life (Hawkins et al., 2013). They are also more likely to live in poverty, receive public assistance, be incarcerated, and have poor health outcomes (Winnie & Muchesia, 2023; Wild et al., 2023; Kishore & Shaji, 2012; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2004). In addition, students who are dropping out from school are at higher risk of experiencing low mental health & well-being and mostly engaging in delinquent behavior (see also Kumar et al., 2023; Parreño, 2023; Liem et al., 2010; Sweeten et al., 2009). Risky behavior may also contribute to educational underachievement and increase the likelihood of dropping out (Maertens, 2013). Interestingly, previous research has shown that boys who drop out of school tend to work with their family in a family business or enter the labor market, while girls tend to get married (Rao, 2010). Consequently, it is significant to discourse the student's dropout issue at higher secondary levels and implement operative prevention plans to alleviate these undesirable outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What are the reasons of student's dropout at Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta city?
2. Do we have any prevention plan or strategy for stopping dropout at Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta city?

Research Objectives

1. To find out the reasons of student's dropout at Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta city.

- To explore the prevention plan or strategy for stopping dropout at Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta city by teachers or head of the institutes.

Research Design

Research Methodology is a crucial component of academic research. This descriptive study was purely quantitative, which attempted to explore and examine the factors such as causes and prevention of dropout in the HSS of Quetta. To draw meaningful conclusions about the strategies and causes of dropout prevention in HSS in Quetta, it is necessary to study the entire population. However, due to limited time and financial resources, a purposive sampling method was used to select teachers (N=78) from the population of all teachers in HSS of Quetta, Balochistan, without any age limitations, along with the educational administration of Balochistan.

The tool was adopted with the permission of the primary author named Lucky, H. (2011), and used with modification in the items where needed. The survey consisted of 18 items, with 10 items focusing on the reasons for dropout and 8 items related to prevention plans for reducing dropout rates in schools. However, a 5-point Likert Scale was established to fill the responses from the participants, starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The collection of data for the research at hand is a highly significant part of the research. For this purpose, a Google survey form was utilized for collecting data, to complete the study within the time frame. However, the data were analyzed using percentage and chi-square methods through the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

Findings

Table 1 exemplifies the demographic characteristics of the participant of the current study, which indicates that male participants (57.7%) were in the majority as compared to the female participants (42.3%). The largest group of participants (29.5%) lies in the age range from 31 to 35 years, followed by 41 to 45 years (24.4%), although only a small percentage (2.6%) were aged between 26 to 30 years. In terms of the participant's qualifications, 49 participants had a Master's degree (62.8%), whereas 25 participants had completed their M.Phil. degree (32.1%). Among the participants, the majority were teachers by profession (83.3%), other participants were principals or head teachers (12.8%), and only 3.8% were from educational administrative staff.

Table 1.

Demographic Statistics (N = 78)

		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender	Male	45	57.7%	1.58	.497
	Female	33	42.3%		
Age	26 – 30	2	2.6%	3.49	1.412
	31 – 35	23	29.5%		
	36 – 40	16	20.5%		
	41 – 45	19	24.4%		
	46 – 50	8	10.3%		
	51 above	10	12.8%		
Qualification	Bachelors	2	2.6%	2.35	.577
	Masters	49	62.8%		
	M.Phil.	25	32.1%		
	Ph.D.	2	2.6%		
Profession	Teachers	65	83.3%	1.24	.648
	Head	10	12.8%		
	Teachers/Principles				
	Educational Administrators	3	3.8%		

Objective 1: Reasons of student's dropout at higher secondary schools of Quetta city

The present study aimed at identifying the reasons behind student dropout rates, participants were asked to respond to 10 questions. Results showed that a majority of participants (43.47%) agreed with the reasons given for student dropout, while 24.08% disagreed. A small proportion (11.79%) remained neutral, while 7.98% strongly agreed with the statements. The item with the highest mean score was the lack of co-curricular activities in school (M=4.09, SD=.996), with most participants disagreeing (47.7%) or strongly disagreeing (37.2%) with the notion that there was no concern regarding the

absence of such activities. The item with the lowest mean score was the lack of teacher-student relationship (M=1.76, SD=.809).

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of reasons of student's dropout (N = 78)

		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>NA/ ND</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Lack of Teacher Student relationship	33 (42.3%)	35 (44.9%)	6 (7.7%)	4 (5.1%)	0	1.76	.809
2	Lack of Co-curricular activities in school.	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.1%)	5 (6.4%)	37 (47.4%)	29 (37.2%)	4.09	.996
3	School has no concern students' dropout.	1 (1.3%)	23 (29.5%)	9 (11.5%)	32 (41.0%)	13 (16.7%)	3.42	1.123
4	School has high expectations for all students.	14 (17.9%)	48 (61.5%)	10 (12.8%)	6 (7.7%)	0	2.10	.783
5	School has a Parent involvement coordinator.	9 (11.5%)	38 (48.7%)	12 (15.4%)	18 (23.1%)	1 (1.3%)	2.54	1.015
6	School related issues results in dropout.	1 (1.3%)	25 (32.1%)	11 (14.1%)	36 (46.2%)	5 (6.4%)	3.24	1.022
7	No check & balance regardir absenteeism by school.	5 (6.4%)	38 (48.7%)	17 (21.8%)	15 (19.2%)	3 (3.8%)	2.65	.991
8	Lack of community support to reduce the dropout rate.	1 (1.3%)	29 (37.2%)	14 (17.9%)	27 (34.6%)	7 (9.0%)	3.13	1.061
9	Family issues of students unrelated to school.	11 (14.1%)	48 (61.5%)	6 (7.7%)	10 (12.8%)	3 (3.8%)	2.31	.997
10	Most students belong to low-income families.	22 (28.2%)	46 (59.0%)	3 (3.8%)	5 (6.4%)	2 (2.6%)	1.96	.904
	Total	100 (12.67%)	343 (43.47%)	93 (11.79%)	190 (24.08%)	63 (7.98%)	27.205	2.8665

To explore the relationship between reasons for student dropouts given by male and female participants, a chi-square test was conducted, as presented in Table 3. The investigation exposed that there is no significant relationship between the motives declared by the female and male participants, as the estimated *p*-value was found .572. Figure 1, portrayed a bar graph, and shows the retorts of female and male participants for each reason.

Table 3.

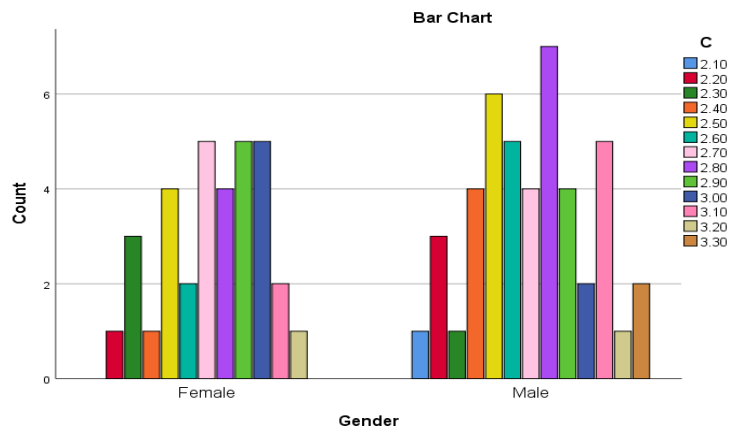
Chi-square test to explore the reasons of student's dropout by male & female participants

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.500 ^a	12	.572
Likelihood Ratio	11.765	12	.465
Linear-by-Linear Association	.175	1	.676
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 22 cells (84.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .42.

Figure 1.

Responses of male and female participants for the reasons asked for dropout



Objective 2: Prevention plan or strategy for stopping dropout at Higher Secondary Schools of Quetta city by teachers or head of the institutes

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the prevention plans or strategies that can be used by HSS teachers or principals to reduce dropout rates. Participants were asked 8 questions and the majority of them agreed (strongly agreed 20.1% and agreed 41.9%) with the different prevention plans proposed for implementation at the HSS level. Meanwhile, only 20% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with any of the prevention plans, and 17% totally disagreed with having any prevention plans. The highest mean score was observed for the statement “Teachers' training to identify the risk factors of dropout causes” with a mean of 3.31 (SD=1.073), although 39% of participants disagreed with the statement. The lowest mean score was observed for the statement “Communicating with parents /guardians to decrease the dropout” with a mean of 1.46 (SD=.551), where the majority (97.4%) agreed with this prevention plan.

Table 4.
Descriptive statistics of prevention plan or strategy for stopping student's dropout (N = 78)

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>NA/ND</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 Application of “No Child Left Behind law.	20 (25.6%)	35 (44.9%)	17 (21.8%)	5 (6.4%)	1 (1.3%)	2.13	.917
2 Teachers' training to identify the risk factors of drop out causes.	6 (7.7%)	15 (19.2%)	18 (23.1%)	32 (41.0%)	7 (9.0%)	3.24	1.107
3 Parental involvement in dropout prevention plan	42 (53.8%)	27 (34.6%)	5 (6.4%)	3 (3.8%)	1 (1.3%)	1.64	.868
4 Communicating with parents /guardians to decrease dropout.	44 (56.4%)	32 (41.0%)	2 (2.6%)	0	0	1.46	.551
5 The school based General Education Development programs to reduce dropout.	10 (12.8%)	48 (61.5%)	17 (21.8%)	2 (2.6%)	1 (1.3%)	2.18	.734
6 Commitment of school's leadership to reduce dropout.	17 (21.8%)	47 (60.3%)	6 (7.7%)	7 (9.0%)	1 (1.3%)	2.08	.879
7 A proper school program to assist possible dropouts	3 (3.8%)	26 (33.3%)	35 (44.9%)	14 (17.9%)	0	2.77	.788
8 Use of different strategies that can keep students engaged, involved & connected.	7 (9.0%)	44 (56.4%)	17 (21.8%)	10 (12.8%)	0	2.38	.825

To examine the relationship between the statements of male and female participants regarding the prevention plans proposed as future strategies, a descriptive statistic test ‘chi-square’ was conducted (see Table 5). The test outcomes

indicated that there was no significant relationship exists between the statements of female & male respondents for the prevention plans, as the p-value of .706 was greater than the significance level of .05. The accompanying bar graph (Figure 2) displays the ratio of male to female participants for each statement regarding prevention plans.

Table 5.

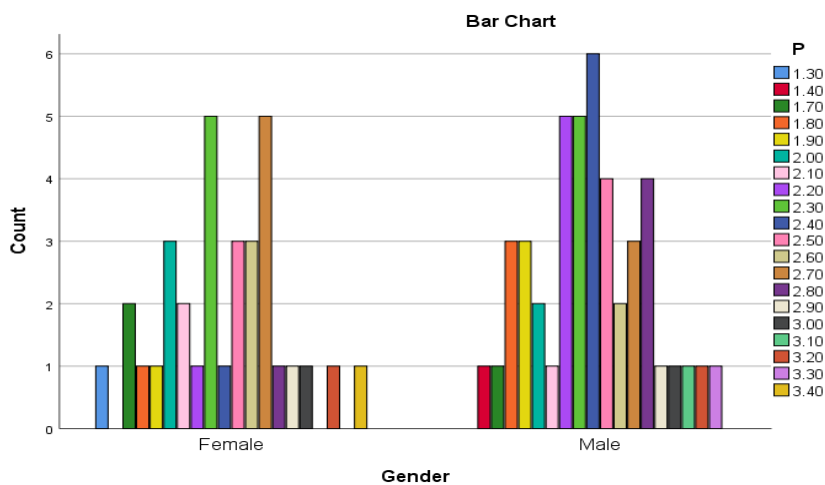
Chi-square test of prevention plan or strategy for stopping student's dropout by male & female participants

	Value	d f	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.263 ^a	19	.706
Likelihood Ratio	17.703	19	.542
Linear-by-Linear Association	.003	1	.954
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 39 cells (97.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .42.

Figure 2.

Ratio of male to female for the statement asked for the prevention plan



Discussion

A serious problem that can have a long-lasting negative effect on students and their communities is HSS dropout rates. Research has uncovered several underlying factors that contribute to HSS dropouts as well as potential defenses against them. However, the dropout rate especially at higher secondary level in the district Quetta has become a significant issue. Many students in this district leave their education incomplete, and the majority of students drop out before completing their education. So, this study's purpose was to explore & identify the primary causes/reasons for dropping out at the higher secondary level in this district through teachers' perceptions. The study utilized a simple technique, percentage & chi-square method to analyze the causes and prevention of dropout.

Furthermore, it has been noted that the students who are at a high risk of dropping out due to the reasons revealed in the previous as well as in the current study's findings, may have a more severe negative impression on certain individuals than on others. According to Ramsdal et al. (2018), they are likely to struggle to lead independent lives long after leaving their higher secondary schools. These issues can be overcome by different intervention plans including comprehensive educational plans, collaborative learning environments, and targeted support for students according to their needs as well as a modified curriculum.

However, the issue of student dropout remains a significant challenge for policymakers and educators worldwide, as it has a detrimental effect on the socioeconomic stability of a country (see also Winny & Muchesia, 2023; Kakar et al., 2021; Lucky, 2011). It is imperative to first accurately define the problematic areas and understand the causes, to effectively address the issue of student dropout at HSS levels. By providing equal educational rights or educational opportunities for every student without any discrimination, increasing socialization & economic capital for all students

& teachers, provide opportunities to participate in all educational activities, we can work together to reduce the school dropout rates and make sure that all students have a chance to complete their higher education.

In a recent study also support the current research findings that a lack of relatedness, autonomy, and subject interest increases the likelihood of dropout at higher secondary level. Meeting basic psychological needs, positively impacts subject interest and reduces dropout rates (see Wild et al, 2023). The study also highlights the importance of addressing BPNs and promoting subject interest to prevent dropout. Furthermore, in a qualitative case study findings revealed that school dropouts exhibit low learning motivation, introversion, poor self-control, anxiety, a tendency to surrender, and economic independence due to circumstances (Rosada & Lestari, 2023). Factors contributing to dropping out include irresponsible parents with low educational aspirations, student-teacher conflicts, the minimal role of teachers as parental figures, negative peer influence, and bullying. Understanding the psychological condition and social relations of adolescents can aid in identifying their vulnerability to dropping out, emphasizing the need for psychological support and involving parents, teachers, and peers as a support system to prevent dropout (see also Long & Noor, 2023; Rosada & Lestari, 2023; Wild et al., 2023; Saghir, 2023).

It is a very crucial issue to resolve and prevent students from dropping out of their higher school; it can lead to unemployment, lack of confidence in personality, and reduced quality of life for these students. Even though various methods have been suggested to prevent dropout in previous studies (see also Rosada & Lestari, 2023; Wild et al., 2023; Winny & Muchesia, 2023), there has been limited evaluation of their effectiveness. The current study also highlights the issues regarding no prevention strategies used by the school heads and by the government. Just a few NGOs and other educational foundations are working on students who have been dropping out of their schools at low or no cost.

Conclusion

Dropout rates of HSS of Quetta can have a detrimental effect on those who leave school, their families, and the larger society. Addressing this problem involves identifying the specific causes of dropout rates at HSS of Quetta, providing financial assistance, and academic and moral support, encouraging parental involvement, improving student engagement, and promoting vocational training. A multifaceted approach is needed, including providing opportunities and improving school infrastructure. These techniques can be used to develop a more encouraging and stimulating learning atmosphere that motivates students to remain enrolled and finish their education. In other terms, these better educational opportunities and completion of higher education results in better employment opportunities, good quality of life in terms of personal well-being, societal growth, and a better outcome as a good citizen for the country as a whole. Therefore, reducing dropout rates in the HSS of Quetta is important for the advancement and growth of people and the society of Balochistan and to meet the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs) which are at 4 regarding quality education.

Additionally, these schools can implement strategies to prevent dropouts, such as providing extracurricular or co-curricular activities in school or outside of school, offering mental support in terms of counseling services in school, mentorship programs for further assistance, and creating a positive as well as inclusive school environment. In this regard, teachers and head teachers can play a significant role to identify and monitor at-risk students for early intervention and facilitate individualized assistance and support where needed. It is also very important to recognize that reducing the rates of dropout comprises a different comprehensive approach to teamwork including communities, families of students, and collaboration among schools, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Working together in a team, having the same aim of reducing the dropout rate and providing quality education to all individuals, can improve the quality of life of every individual.

Recommendations

Generally, deciding what causes the elevated dropout rates: Understanding the causes of pupil abandonment is crucial. Economic poverty, lack of financial support, family-related problems, having no interest in education, and personal issues of mental health & well-being, are just a few common explanations. Interventions can be customized to target the causes once they have been determined.

1. **Improve access to financial aid:** Students frequently leave education due to financial issues. Financial aid should be given to students in the form of grants. Such scholarships can help them overcome obstacles to continuing their education. Specifically, in HSSs of Quetta, there is a need to finance the whole study expenditure of students as people living in this City mostly hail from either the middle class (salaried class) or low class who depend on manual labor for their means of income.
2. **Support students academically and emotionally.** Some students may have trouble with their coursework or face emotional difficulties that have an impact on their scholastic success. These schools can give mentoring programs, counseling services, and tuition to help students with their academic and social needs.
3. **Encourage family involvement:** Parents are crucial in assisting in the schooling of their offspring. By scheduling parent-teacher talks, workshops, or volunteer opportunities, schools can promote family participation.

4. Encourage family involvement: Parents play a significant role in subsidizing their children's education. These HSSs can encourage family involvement by setting up service opportunities, parent-teacher conferences, and seminars.
5. Offer chances for trade training: Some students might favor occupational training over academic courses. Providing students with useful abilities that can lead to job possibilities is possible with vocational training programs.

In general, lowering the dropout rates from HSSs of Quetta City necessitates a multifaceted strategy that takes into account all of the issues that contribute to the issue. To create a welcoming and stimulating learning atmosphere that motivates students to remain registered and finish their education, schools, parents, and communities must collaborate.

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