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Nomadic Education in Northern Pakistan: The Bakarwal Case

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Abstract

Even in the post Education for All (EFA) era, nomadic groups remain largely absent from educational policy and services. Additionally, there is a severe lack of scholarship in the field of nomadic education, with information on groups in Pakistan completely missing from the current discourse. I conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews of the members of the Bakarwal community. This study provides an examination of fresh data and it also functions as a baseline research for future studies on the Bakarwal nomads in Pakistan. I used a mixed methods approach in this study to better understand the educational goals of nomadic groups and to consider alternative methods of education to achieve these goals. In order to determine the benefits and associated challenges of education as perceived by the Bakarwal community eight interviews in total were conducted; two focus group interviews with recent settlers and one with the old settlers of the transhumant Bakarwal community. Five individual interviews with BMS supervisors were also conducted. The qualitative data was validated against the data of 333 BMS students already conducted by BMS supervisors in 32 literacy centers. The most salient finding is that the Bakarwal do value education as being inherently good for their community while acknowledging challenges associated with access and poverty. The implications of these findings are further discussed in relation to the Bakarwal in Pakistan as well as the broader nomadic community.

Keywords: nomadic education, literacy, innovative teaching, community learning

1. Introduction

Although the expressed desire for education by nomadic peoples in the Indian subcontinent has been noted by scholars (Goodall, 2004, Sofi, 2013), it is unclear what the educational goals are for these nomadic groups. Along with logistical challenges related to voluntary mobility, a lack of input from nomadic peoples contributes to the dearth of educational options for migratory pastoralists. It is commonly assumed that sedentarization is necessary before education can be obtained. Bakarwal Mobile Schools (BMS) challenge this assumption by delivering education directly to the nomadic Bakarwal community in northern Pakistan.

Pastoral nomads, defined by Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson (1980) as “groups who are principally dependent on livestock and for whom spatial mobility is regularly employed as a survival strategy” (p. 16) are often viewed as homogeneous even across ethnic lines. While some anthropologists have attempted to describe universal attributes among different nomadic groups, Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson (quoting Spooner, 1971) argue that “there are no features of culture or social

organization that are common to all nomads or even that are found exclusively among nomads” (p. 17). In large part, this is due to the way in which “pastoralism involves contingent responses to a wide range of variables in the physical and social environment” (p. 18). This necessitates a local understanding of each individual group. Otherwise, one understanding of a particular group may erroneously be applied to all nomadic groups contributing to the decontextualized nature of current discourse around nomadism criticized by Dyer (2006).

Nomadic populations in South Asia have drawn the attention of anthropologists for decades (Bacon, 1954, Salzman, 1988, Gooch, 1992 and 1998, Tapper, 2008). This enthusiasm for research has not, however, crossed over to the field of education and only a limited amount of literature on the study of nomadic education in the region is available. Nomadic education has received more attention in Africa than other regions (Carr-Hill & Peart, 2005, Närman, 1990, Orodho & P. Waweru & K. Getange & J. Miriti, 2013, J. Orodho & P. Waweru & K. Getange, 2014). South Asia, despite being home to millions of nomadic peoples (Krätli & Dyer, 2009, p. 34), lacks serious scholarly attention. Perhaps an exception is the work of Caroline Dyer. Dyer (2006) has focused on the literacy initiatives among the Rabari nomads of India, casting light on some of the challenges associated with providing education to nomads. Of particular relevance is her claim that "decontextualized discourse" is useless in fulfilling EFA promises among minority groups such as nomads (Dyer, 2006, p. 172), where traditional methods of schooling do not apply. In her conclusion, Dyer calls for a closer examination of the unique context of nomads in the field of education.

Research on education among Bakarwal nomads is equally sparse. Aparna Rao, however, has drawn attention to the educational situation among the Bakarwal in India. Rao provides insight into efforts made by India to provide Bakarwal nomads with education including mobile schools initiated as early as 1976 and challenges the assumption that development and education for nomads require sedentarization (Rao, 2006, p. 72). She argues that basic education should be adapted to the distinct needs of nomads and their abilities.

The process of sedentarization is a common theme in studies on nomadic groups (Rosman & Rubel, 1976). Sarah Goodall (2004) provides an interesting insight in her study on factors affecting the urbanization of three different nomadic groups in the Ladakh region of India. Of particular relevance to education is the finding that the expansion of educational services in general has led to a feeling of "relative deprivation" (p. 223) among pastoral nomads. In essence, nomadic groups feel “left behind” as they see other segments of society accessing education, resulting in a heightened sense of their own need for education. This confirms the claims by Dyer (2001) that the acquired need of education is one of the chief reasons due to which nomadic groups settle down. Studies on the Bakarwal in Pakistan carried out by medical NGO Merlin (2006) and in India carried out by Sofi (2013), reveal that the

desire for education is keenly felt. In the study of Sofi (2013), it was revealed as a key factor in nomadic groups settling down. The question remains, however, if nomadic groups would still choose to settle if education was delivered to them directly.

On a global level, the nomadic world is in a state of transition where general population growth, state-level policy issues, and globalization are making traditional nomadic lifestyles more difficult. Dyer (2010) argues that this is best understood from a conflict perspective, where dominant groups are using education as a tool to establish hegemony over minority groups. Focusing her research on nomads in India, she builds her case that by not providing alternative educational methods, the powerful are depriving the vulnerable and the only way forward for the latter remains settlement and assimilation (p. 309). Additionally, nomadic groups, including the Bakarwal in India, are generally deemed a nuisance (Gooch, 1992, Sharma, 2011, p. 16, Dyer, 2006) and the policies of many countries in South Asia have been to encourage nomadic groups to abandon the nomadic lifestyle and settle down. This issue is explored by Ajit Kumar (2013), who describes various tactics employed through policy and legislation, most recently evident in India's ruling that the traditional livelihoods of peripatetic nomads are criminal (p. 403). This coerced transition to a sedentary life results in nomadic communities feeling a loss of identity as nomadism is more than an economic strategy, it is a cultural identifier (Sharma, 2011). In addition to sedentarization, formal education also plays a role in the loss of traditional values (Rao, 2006) culminating into a cultural crisis.

2. Purpose of the study

In this article, I introduce the Bakarwal perspectives on education and an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the BMS initiative in providing a relevant education to this community. By describing Bakarwal values in relation to education I endeavor to avoid "decontextualized discourse" (Dyer, 2006) often found in large-scale studies. The research is significant as it will contribute to the limited literature on nomadic education and will provide information on a unique, local perspective missing in the macro analysis of educational expansion. This study provides an examination of fresh data and it also functions as a baseline research for future studies on Bakarwal nomads in Pakistan. This is the first study of its kind on Bakarwals in Pakistan and perhaps on Pakistani pastoral nomads in general. Additionally, findings about Bakarwal nomads in northern Pakistan can function as a starting point for developing more inclusive educational services and policy for the millions of nomads in the Indian subcontinent.

2.1. The Bakarwal Case

Bakarwal pastoral shepherds move across Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. The UK based Non-Government Organization (NGO) Merlin (2006) estimates the number of Bakarwal families in Pakistan to be 3000, representing anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 people, although official numbers are unavailable. The Bakarwal population is estimated at 12,000 in the Jammu and Kashmir area of India, and comprises both fully-nomadic and semi-nomadic groups (Rao, 1990). Those dwelling within Pakistan's borders typically migrate between the Deosai Plateau, Neelum Valley and Khagan Valley in summer and southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/northern Punjab in winter. The Bakarwal primarily raise goats and sheep, are ethnic Gujars and speak a variety of Gojri dialects (Losey, 2002).

The only known educational initiative attempting to cater the needs of Bakarwal nomads in Pakistan is the Bakarwal Mobile Schools (BMS) program. The origins of the BMS program date back to 2007, when members of the Bakarwal community approached a linguist with SIL International expressing the need for literacy education in their own community. Working in consultation with this linguist, the community produced Gojri primers and readers that would become the foundation of the BMS curriculum. Over time the BMS program developed into a mother-tongue based multi-lingual literacy program with the aim of reaching pastoral nomads in northern Pakistan with basic education. Since its beginning, BMS has promoted girls' education, stating that its primary goal is to provide "the opportunity for boys and girls alike to commence upon a full course of primary schooling—with secondary effects of gender equality and preservation of a threatened indigenous language and culture along with increased capacity for self-advocacy" (Losey, 2007, p. 1).

The program grew organically over the years and as of June 2014 operates 33 mobile (traveling) literacy centers with an official enrollment of 496 students, 242 Boys, 207 Girls, 14 men and 33 women, shown in Figure 1. Initially the project was funded by SIL International, in partnership with Lakarmissionen, a Swedish International Non-Government Organization since 2009.

3. Data and Methodology

A better understanding of the context and aspirations of nomadic groups in a rapidly changing society is the first step towards developing and delivering appropriate education to this overlooked population. In order to determine the benefits and associated challenges of education as perceived by the Bakarwal community eight interviews in total were conducted; two focus group interviews with recent settlers and one with the old settlers of the transhumant Bakarwal community, and five individual interviews with BMS supervisors were conducted.

All interviews were semi-structured. These interviews were recorded and collected by the Islamabad-based NGO, Forum for Language Initiatives, during an

external evaluation of the BMS program requested in 2013 by Lakarmissionen, a donor of BMS. The interviews were primarily recorded in Urdu, with two interviews conducted in Pashto. I have translated and transcribed all Urdu interviews, with a BMS supervisor providing the summary and translation of Pashto portions. Considering the emic nature of the qualitative portion of this analysis, inductive codes were initially derived from the full transcription and open coding of the first three interviews leading to “an interactive model of research design,” (Maxwell, 2012)

This process revealed three perceived benefits of education: education as an inherent good, acquiring basic skills and specific to BMS education, the inclusion of Gojri, the L1 of Bakarwals. Finally, two perceived obstacles to obtaining formal education surfaced in the analysis: access and poverty. The qualitative data was validated against the data of 333 BMS students’ evaluations already conducted by BMS supervisors in 32 literacy centers.

4. Findings

For the quantitative analysis I used data compiled from 333 BMS student evaluations carried out by BMS supervisors in 32 literacy centers (see Figure 2): 168 Nursery tests, 52 Prep tests, 48 Class 1 tests, 35 Class 2 tests, 22 Class 3 tests, six Class 4 tests and two Class 5 tests.

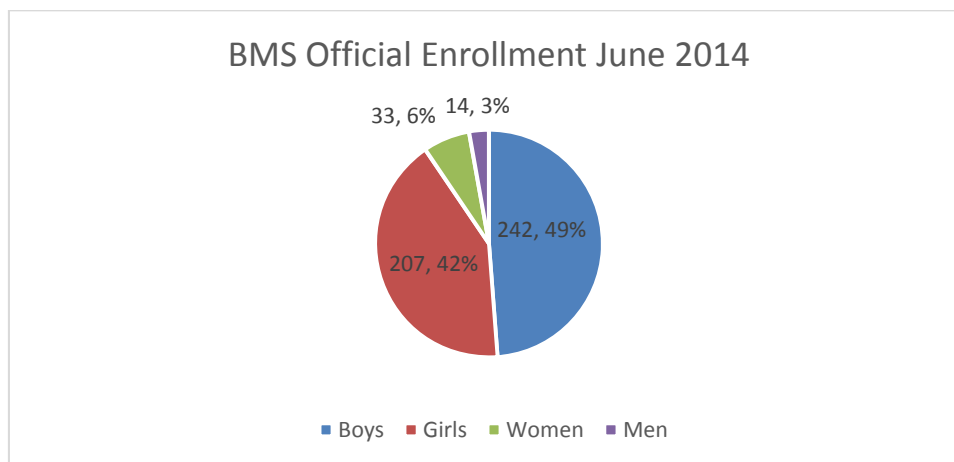


Figure 1. Official BMS Enrollment

In order to address the problems of educational access, BMS attempts to equip moderately educated men and women from the Bakarwal community with the knowledge and skills necessary to work as literacy instructors. BMS provides them with basic teacher training, materials, and a monthly stipend of PKR 3000-9000 (USD 30-90), enabling them to teach the children in their own camps and villages. Teachers receive an initial basic training over the course of two three-day workshops. Supervisors and external consultants then provide in-service teacher training on an on-

going basis through monthly teacher meetings and field checks. Literacy centers range in size from eight students to over 30 and function in both transhumant (seasonal migration) nomadic camps as well as recently settled Bakarwal villages.

Initially, the BMS structure was very loose with students studying at their own pace. Since 2011, the program has become more structured, including the placement of students into different grades as shown in Table 1: Nursery, Prep, Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, Class 4 and Class 5. This allows for program wide standardized testing to be performed. In 2012 the BMS Supervisors carried out informal student evaluations in each subject: Reading (Gojri in Nursery and Prep and Urdu in Class 1 and Class 2), Numeracy, English, Social Studies, Science and Islamic Studies. These evaluations were followed up by more formal evaluations during the summer of 2013.

Table 1
Subjects by Class

Class	Reading	Numeracy	English	Social Studies	Science	Islamic Studies
Nursery	X					
Prep	X	X	X			
Class 1	X	X	X	X		
Class 2	X	X	X	X		
Class 3	X	X	X	X	X	X
Class 4	X	X	X	X	X	X
Class 5	X	X	X	X	X	X

4.1. Qualitative Results

An analysis of the data derived from interviews conducted with the members of the nomadic Bakarwal community reveals five main themes shown in figure 3. I have categorized these themes as perceived benefits of education and perceived challenges to obtain a formal education. The three perceived benefits of education were highlighted by interviewees as: education as an inherent good (24 occurrences), acquiring basic skills (8 occurrences), and, specific to BMS education, Gojri literacy (5 occurrences). The benefits of Gojri being taught in the BMS program include language preservation and the ability to learn subsequent languages, such as Urdu. Other benefits mentioned by participants included the ability to study the Quran and teachers receiving a stipend.

The two themes pertaining to challenges were accessed (19 occurrences) and poverty (7 occurrences). Access was discussed in terms of challenges related to distance (6 occurrences) and nomadism (5 occurrences). Additionally, access was mentioned with reference to BMS’s methodology (8 occurrences), such as class being held at home and school mobility. Nomadism, or more specifically traveling north for the summer, was viewed as a separate issue from distance, as distance affected all communities,

while nomadism affected only those that travel north in the summer. Nomadism refers specifically to the spring migration of transhumant communities to remote mountain pastures where no schools exist. Distance is a broader issue experienced by both migrating camps and recently settled Bakarwal villages, where camps and villages are too far from established schools for children to enroll, regardless of migration patterns. Thus, these issues, though related, are expressed as being distinct from each other by participants. Finally, poverty was mentioned as a challenge to obtaining education through traditional means.

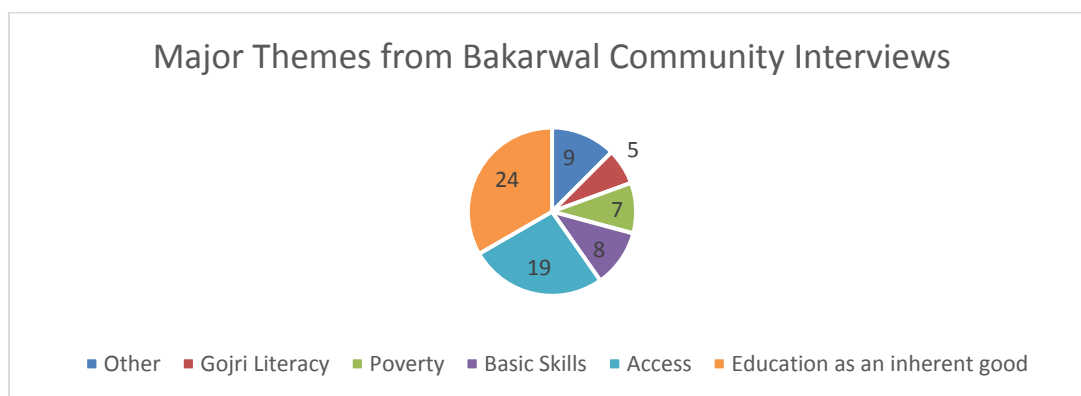


Figure 2. Major Themes from Participant Interviews

4.2. Education as an inherent good

The perception of education as an inherent good was the most commonly perceived benefit of obtaining an education. This sentiment took numerous forms in response to the question “What benefit is there to having an education?” Ghulam¹ simply stated that “education is good for our people” (Focus group, 8 April 2013), while Shahid elaborated by saying “it is the kind of environment these days where people cannot get by without studies” (Focus group 2, 11 April 2013). There was a consistent assumption that education, whether expressed as “school” or “Talim” (education), is an inherent good for the Bakarwal community.

The inherent goodness of education was also expressed through a negative perception of being uneducated, or in a positive light - education enables children to escape being uneducated. In response to the above question four participants contrasted the benefits of having an education to the negative of being uneducated. Ghulam (Focus group 1, 8 April, 2013) stated that since the opening of their literacy center, “Our children study. It is better to be educated than uneducated. Now our

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all research participants.

children study and acquire talim.” Perhaps this transition from the negative of being uneducated to the benefits of education is best described by Haroon:

“We will not close it. There were night and darkness before (raat thi andhera tha), now the light has come (lou a gayee). We would find someone to keep teaching our children. We were in darkness and have come into light. We were uneducated. I am uneducated. If others ask [about my education], what can I say?” (Focus group, 9 April 2013)

4.3. Acquiring basic skills

The interviewees also mentioned acquiring basic skills and their immediate impact as a benefit of education. This includes letter recognition, number recognition, reading and writing in general, and the ability to write one’s name (mentioned by three different interviewees). The benefit of these skills was contrasted to the difficulties uneducated people experience. In the Attock School, for example, community elders commented that “We are poor people and we are illiterate and we cannot even check mobile phone numbers. Now, due to this school, our children can dial numbers and use mobile phones easily” (Focus group, 14 April 2013).

It is interesting to note that the only interviewee to mention education as a means to a better career was a Bakarwal man who left the nomadic lifestyle, obtained a high level of education and enjoyed a successful career in the military. Speaking of the impact of BMS this man, Sidique, claimed,

“The results of this project will be known later. Now is the planting. The ground is becoming ready. It is a nursery. Those children who already passed primary are achieving excellent records and grades in high school... In the future, they can make a great career in professional groups like medical and engineering, because when the foundation is strong then the leaves and branches become strong and the fruit becomes strong...”

(BMSPI)

Another interviewee, Javed, mentioned that others who obtained an education outside of BMS were sent off to find “nokri” (work) in the city, indicating that education is occasionally perceived as a means to employment outside of the nomadic lifestyle. At the same time he presented education as a means to continue the nomadic life. When asked if he wanted to move to the city, he explained that they were happy with the nomadic “mahol” (environment) they lived in, herding sheep and goats, and traveling north in the winter. All they were lacking, he claimed, was education (BMSPII).

4.4. Gojri Literacy

Finally, participants mentioned Gojri, the L1 of Bakarwal people, as a positive element within the BMS program specifically. This was expressed in relation to the preserving nature of mother-tongue education as Sidique explained “Now Gojri is being used. When teachers do not protect their own language, then others will not. We will do it and for this reason, all of the Gujar clans that reside in the mountains will not forget Gojri” (Focus group3, 16 April 2013). One participant also claimed that learning Gojri would help in learning other languages by saying "When they understand Gojri, Urdu will come naturally. If they know how to write Gojri, then they will learn Pokhari, Pashto" (Focus group3, 16 April 2013). It is important to note that these are camps that currently host a BMS school, which advocates for mother-tongue education. This perceived benefit requires more research to determine whether or not communities not in contact with BMS express the benefits of mother-tongue education in similar ways.

4.4.1. Access. The challenges expressed by the Bakarwal community are perhaps not surprising, but the emphasis does reveal the tension experienced by participants. There is an expressed desire by parents for children to participate in education; however, formal education does not accommodate the nomadic lifestyle in any way. Javed expressed the problem with access due to the distance by stating "We felt a great lack [before a school came]. Our children here did not have any education... Schools were very far. These were very small girls and boys and they could not go so far every day" (BMSPXX). The problem of distance was discussed by both transhumant communities and recently settled Bakarwal communities, showing that this is an issue not only related to seasonal travel but also for those that settle in the “jungle” (remote areas). Saber, a settled Bakarwal, expressed frustration at BMS for giving priority to the transhumant population as “the children of those that remain in the jungle are also unable to go to school” (Focus group 3, 16 April 2013).

Though related to distance, the challenge of access due to migration patterns or nomadic nature, was viewed as a separate issue. This difference is highlighted by Masood, a supervisor with the BMS program, who explained that “Those who travel north cannot admit their kids to a school because they live here for 2 or 3 months, and then return; so can’t take admissions in government schools.” (Focus group, 18 April 2013). This flexibility and mobility of BMS education have appealed to many others like Nizam who was the first to request mobile schools for his community. Describing the origins of BMS, he explained how a linguist asked him what Bakarwals need the most and he responded that “The most necessary thing for us is schools, ones that are mobile, that our children may receive an education” (BMSPI).

This issue of access was also discussed in relation to the BMS program, particularly the ability to study in their immediate camp. When asked if the education of his students was interrupted due to migration patterns, BMS teacher Murtaza noted that “There is [interruption] during the 2 months of travel. When we arrive at our home

(makan) there is no disturbance. Our school is in our home. Studies are in the home. Everyone is together” (Focus group 1, 8 April 2013). Haroon put it this way “Our children could not enter school before. Then the organization [BMS] cooperated with us and now our children sit in their home and are obtaining an education (Talim). For us this is a great benefit.” (Focus group 2, 9 April 2013).

4.4.2. Poverty. Poverty was considered a challenge in obtaining an education by Bakarwals. This was described by those who claimed to be “gharib” or poor and those who claimed to be “maskeen.” Poverty results in a state of weakness and helplessness. Haroon claims that his people could not have obtained an education without the help of BMS because “we would have to buy pens, paper, notebooks, and items like this. We are maskeen people, if we have a 100 rupee expense we start to scheme” (Focus group 2, 9 April 2013). In a separate location, community members expressed the challenge of poverty by claiming that they could not send their children to private schools because of inflation (BMSPIV).

This tension of desiring education while being nomadic combined with the additional perception of poverty are discussed by Qasim, a Gujar business man whose family left the nomadic lifestyle when he was a child. He explains the motivation behind nomadic groups leaving their traditional life:

“Within the Bakarwal community, there are 2 big reasons for this. One is the parents’ desire to give their children education. The second is because of poverty. People cannot afford [the Bakarwal life]. Their animals are few. For this reason, they give it up.” (BMSPV)

5. Demographic Distribution of Quantitative Data

Three hundred thirty three BMS student evaluations were carried out by BMS supervisors in 32 literacy centers (see Figure 2), 168 Nursery tests, 52 Prep tests, 48 Class 1 tests, 35 Class 2 tests, 22 Class 3 tests, six Class 4 tests and two Class 5 tests.

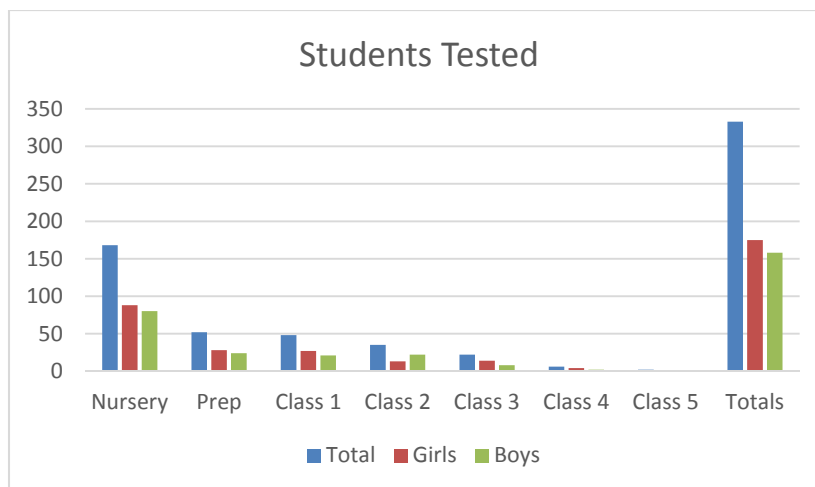


Figure 3. Students Tested

5.1. Quantitative Findings

In order to determine the efficacy of the BMS program to meet expectations and address unique challenges as expressed by interviewees, I have analyzed BMS student achievement data.

5.1.1. Basic Skills. Reading assessments of girls to boys were compared for the grades Nursery to Class 2. Figure 4 shows that overall performance of boys and girls has been uniform across grades.

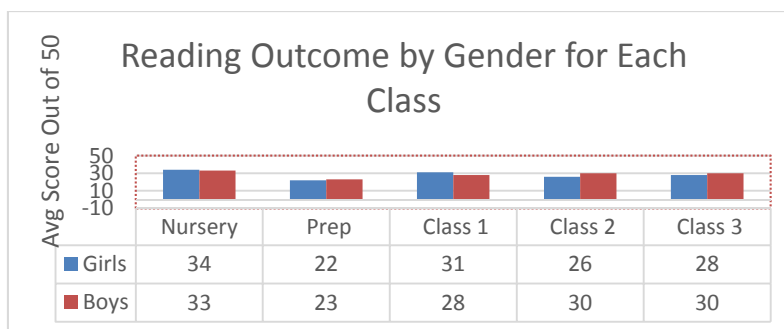


Figure 4. Reading Outcome by Gender for Each Class

A comparison of Numeracy scores between boys and girls in classes Prep, Class 1, and Class 2, as shown in Figure 5, reveals a significant difference between the average test scores of boys and girls in Class 2 only. In Class 2, girls average 13.5 and boys 22.5 ($p=.003$), while in other classes they perform at similar levels.

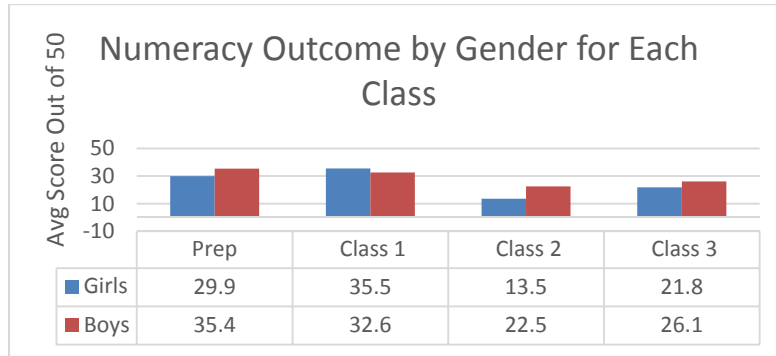


Figure 5. Numeracy Outcome by Gender for Each Class

An examination of scores in English, shown in Figure 6, reveals no significant differences between genders, with boys and girls following very similar trends across classes.

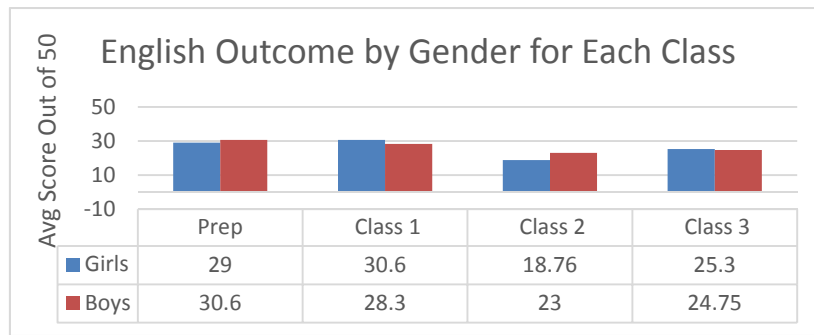


Figure 6. English Outcome by Gender for Each Class

For both genders, there is a sharp drop between Nursery and Prep scores in each subject. For example, the average Reading score for girls drops from 34.3 to 22.3, and the score for boys drops from 33.9 to 23.7.

5.1.2. Inclusion of Gojri. In order to evaluate the actual impact of including Gojri literacy in the BMS program, I analyzed the relationship between success in Gojri and success in other subjects. Figure 7 shows a positive moderate and significant correlation between Prep Reading scores (Gojri) and English scores in Prep ($r=.62$, $p<.05$). Thus, those students who perform well in Reading tend to perform well in English and vice versa.

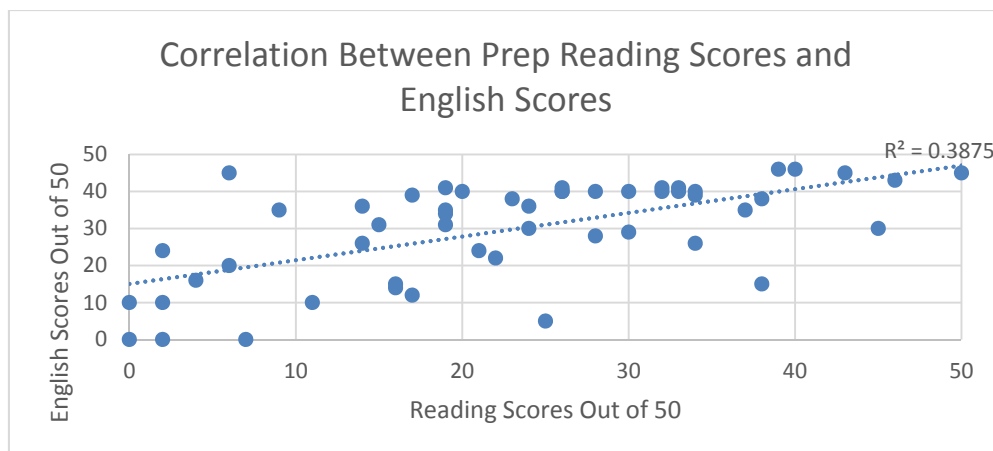


Figure 7. Correlation of Prep Reading and English Scores

There is also a positive moderate and significant correlation between Reading scores and Numeracy scores, seen in Figure 8, in Prep class ($r=.61$, $p<.05$), revealing that Prep students performing well in Reading also tend to perform well in Numeracy and vice versa.

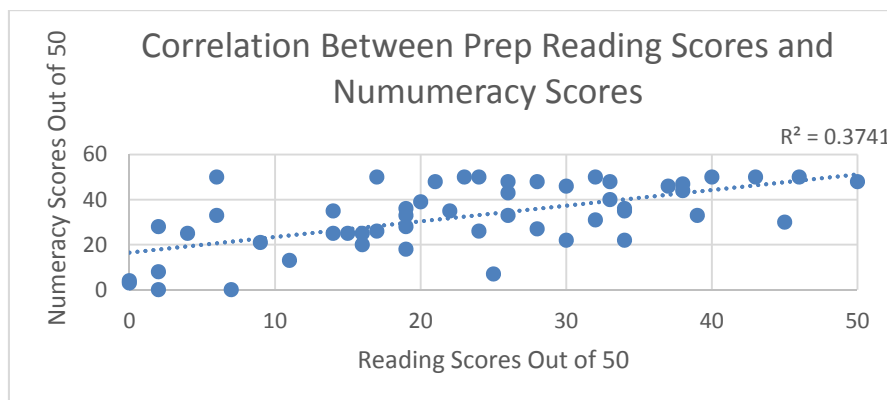


Figure 8. Correlation of Prep Reading and Numeracy Score

5.1.3. Access. The analysis of Reading scores for students in classes Nursery, Prep, Class 1 and Class 2 shown in Figure 9 reveals an overall similarity in outcome regardless of an instructor’s education. The only instance in which a discrepancy in Reading scores surfaces is in Prep. Here, students of non-graduate instructors show an average score of 19.65, compared to an average score of 25.62 for students of graduate instructors.

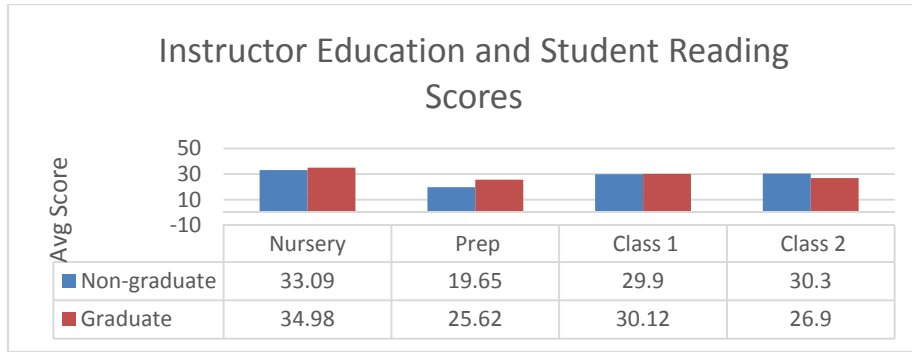


Figure 9. Relationship between Instructor’s Education and Student Reading Scores

Figure 10 shows us that student scores in Numeracy for Prep students studying with non-graduate instructors have similar average scores as students of graduate instructors, 31.4 and 33.2 respectively, and, somewhat counter intuitively significantly outperform students of graduate instructors in Class 1 with scores of 37.3 and 32.8 respectively ($p=.048$). Class 2 results show no significant difference in scores.

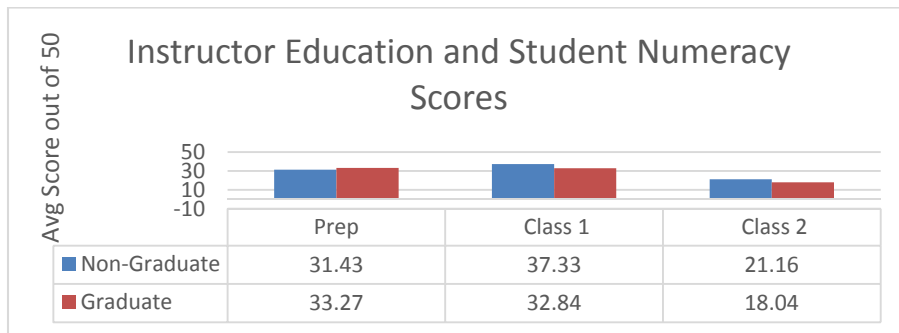


Figure 10. Relationship between Instructor’s Education and Student Numeracy Scores

Similarly, a comparison of English test scores, shown in Figure 11 for those studying with graduate instructors to those with non-graduate instructors reveals no significant differences in outcomes for any class.

Nomadic Education in Northern Pakistan

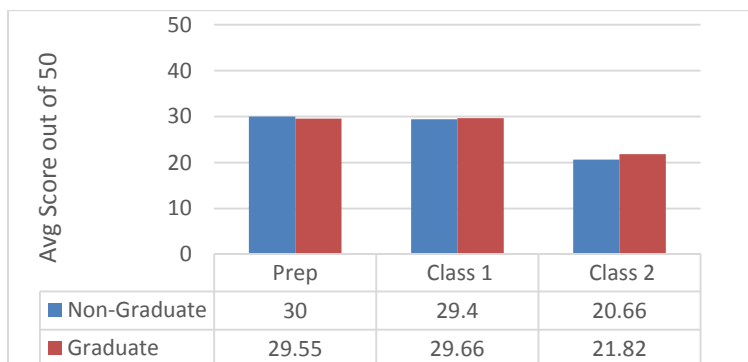


Figure 11. Relationship between Instructor’s Education and Student English Scores

There is a clear discrepancy between Nursery Reading assessment scores for schools opened in January, 2013 and schools opened before 2013. Figure 12 shows new schools performed significantly better than pre-2013 schools. The average Reading score of the 64 Nursery students in pre-2013 schools is 28.6, while those students in 2013 schools have a mean score of 37.5 (with $t=-4.9$ and $p=0.00$).

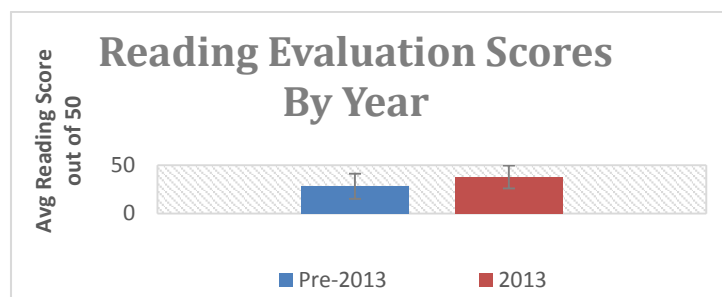


Figure 12. Reading Outcomes for All Students by Year of School Opening

Understanding this relationship is important as these teachers are the main resources employed to provide access to education for the Bakarwal community. While a specific cause cannot be attributed to this discrepancy, one of the key differences between schools opened in 2013 and schools opened between 2007 and 2010 is the level of initial teacher training provided and the level of flexibility in the BMS program. This is discussed more below.

6. Conclusion

In many ways, traditional education creates inequality for non-sedentary populations, where nomadic groups are marginalized by the lack of services provided to them. This forces them to either assimilate to more dominant societies or find a new way forward. While formal schooling methods create inequality by limiting

opportunities for nomads, greater equality can be achieved by considering grassroots, context specific methods of education.

The Bakarwal case provides further evidence that education is a growing value among nomadic groups and is viewed as an inherent good for the community. However, significant obstacles, such as poverty and access continue to prohibit these communities from obtaining even the most basic education. The BMS approach of delivering mother-tongue, multilingual literacy to the Bakarwal through a mobile school platform provides a compelling case for addressing the problem through adaptive forms of nomadic education.

7. Discussion

Overall, the findings above support the claim that education is a growing value among nomadic groups (Goodall, 2004, Merlin, 2006, Sofi, 2013). Additionally, the evidence indicates that the BMS program has made significant strides in developing an alternative form of education that is better suited to the unique context of this vulnerable population. I discuss the implications of these findings in relation to the five themes observed in the Focus groups below.

7.1. Education as an inherent good

The qualitative data in this report clearly shows that education is viewed by the community as being inherently good. Indeed, when asked about whether anyone in the community is against education, Haroon merely said “Only those without understanding” (Focus group, 9 April 2013), and then could not think of any specific examples.

A global norm making framework purports that perspectives on education result from a “dynamic and dialectical process” (p. 378) in which certain values are the result of interactions between a variety of perspectives and persons, thus giving credit to the influences of both broad shifts in global values and local legitimization, rejections and general reactions to these influences. For many nomads the evolving belief that education is inherently good is the evolving culmination of outside influences, such as the INGO SIL International, a sense of shame from being an uneducated man, concern over the viability of leading a nomadic life for his grandchildren, and the rejection of gender mainstreaming by maintaining “purda” in the classroom, along with other more subtle influences. Regarding nomads, this mirrors Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson’s (1980) claim that there are no universals in the global nomadic community since “pastoralism involves contingent responses to a wide range of variables in the physical and social environment” (p. 18).

It is interesting to note that, while certain BMS documents referred to the BMS program as a literacy program, the community consistently referred to it as "schools" where children can obtain "Talim" (education). This indicates that regardless of the

official designation of the BMS program, the community understands the program to be equal to the form of education received in other local schools with the same desired outcome: an educated person.

A common variable linked to the disparity between male and female enrollment ratios in rural Pakistan is the traditional, Islamic values of local society. It is commonly expressed that girls are discouraged from receiving an education as it is un-Islamic. Since BMS instructors are recruited from the Bakarwal community girls are able to attend class in their own context. Bakarwal communities are built around family and girls are encouraged to study since the instructors are usually related. In the event that instructors are not related, classes are held in camp under the supervision of close relatives. This indicates that the traditional values held by Bakarwal society do not discourage the education of girls per se, rather, it discourages the interaction of girls with nonrelated males.

It is unfortunate that cultural and religious traits are often singled out as the primary factor behind inequality in enrollment between boys and girls in Pakistan. Lyon (2004) challenges this assumption by defending “the rationality of local practice and suggest[s] that there is less cultural bias against women than some pervasive rhetoric implies” (p. 3). Taking a similar view, I argue that the educational system in Pakistan is functionally against girls’ education by not providing culturally relevant education that caters to the educational needs as expressed by non-elite segments of society.

7.2. Education for the acquisition of basic skills

Data gathered from the interviews also suggests that the BMS program is assumed to provide the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The emphasis of the BMS curriculum and the test structure, focusing on literacy and numeracy, mirrors the community’s expectations in this regard, especially in first four years. However, as in later years the curriculum becomes more diverse and less practical, with the addition of the government’s social studies, Islamiat, and science curriculum, the interest of students and/or parents is not lost. The inclusion of these subjects, and their alignment to government schools, is helpful in contributing to the sense that the BMS education is equal to other schools in the region.

Numeracy is much celebrated in boys given the segregated nature of the Bakarwal community, as boys grow older they have more opportunity to apply numeracy skills in the marketplace. Dealings in the bazaar, such as the sale of goats or purchasing produce, are handled almost exclusively by men and older boys which is reflected in better Numeracy scores for boys.

7.3. The inclusion of Gojri in BMS education

Including Gojri in the BMS program, or, in other words, the employment of a mother-tongue based multi-lingual education methodology, was viewed as positive by the Bakarwal community. Whether discussed in terms of the preserving nature of mother-tongue education or the cognitive benefit of learning first in one's own language, it was a common theme that learning to read and write in Gorji is beneficial.

The analysis of BMS student test scores supports the views expressed by the community. The positive moderate and significant correlation between Reading and Numeracy scores and Reading and English scores mirror the community's perception that learning Gojri is cognitively beneficial. It has also been evidenced that learning of gojri leaves positive impact on later learning of Urdu.

7.3.1. Access. Apart from the inherent goodness of education, the most common issue raised by interviewees was accessed. This comes as no surprise given the migratory nature of nomadic life. It does, however, reveal the reality on the ground and confirm the critique of many scholars (Goodall, 2004, Kratli & Dyer, 2009, Rao, 2006, Sofi, 2013) that nomadic groups are largely deprived of relevant educational opportunities. It is interesting to note that this issue of access is experienced by both transhumant Bakarwal communities, in relation to mobility, and recently settled Bakarwal communities, in relation to distance, indicating that the issue of access is more complex than just nomadism. This is further confirmation that, while access to education has improved over the years in Pakistan, there are still whole communities, both nomadic and settled, which remain excluded from basic educational services.

The Bakarwal Mobile Schools program has provided an example of an innovative approach to nomadic education which makes strides in addressing the issue of educational access for nomadic peoples. The primary means by which this is accomplished is through equipping moderately educated members of the Bakarwal community to work as teachers for their own children and by structuring the program to be flexible. Keeping in mind that none of the BMS teachers have received formal teacher training, it is useful to determine the efficacy of non-graduate teachers compared to those who completed the 10th grade or studied further. An evaluation of student test scores indicates that, in this context, students have access to the same level of instruction regardless of a teacher's own education. More professional teacher training programs should accommodate those teachers who lack standard qualifications for admission in contexts where no other options are available.

Interviewees also mentioned the convenience and flexibility of the BMS program as an enabling element. This was discussed in terms of studying in the home and having school breaks align with migration patterns. However, in the nomadic context it is difficult to know how much flexibility and independence students and teachers should have. Thus, the comparison of the two BMS cohorts provides some

helpful insights. When the test scores of students in new schools, opened in 2013, are compared to the scores of students in old schools, opened between 2007 and 2010, it is observed that new schools perform significantly better than old schools. This indicates that students are more likely to succeed in mobile education when they are placed in a structured curriculum and with teachers who begin with more established training and oversight.

While students are more likely to succeed in a more structured literacy program, it is important to remember that the new structure for BMS is a result of years of experimentation and adaptation to the unique context in which Bakarwal nomads live. It would be dangerous to conclude that all programs should be fully structured before implementation as this would result in the common error of simple replication without a full understanding of culture and circumstance. It is recommended, however, that the BMS program take steps to bring all instructors up to speed through follow-up training and evaluation.

7.3.2. Poverty. A number of interviewees expressed poverty as an obstacle to obtaining an education. That this was expressed in terms of incidental costs such as pens and paper and private school costs, indicates that they view themselves as poor and helpless in terms of accessing formal education. It is beyond the scope of this research to determine the actual level of financial support the community could contribute to their children's education. It is significant, however, that the community has this perception and it can be assumed that multiple actors and discourses have played a role in normalizing this viewpoint. Building on Goodall's (2004) claims that nomadic groups in India experienced a rise in the perception of "relative deprivation" as services among settled groups improved, it can be argued that this idea held by the Bakarwal in Pakistan stems from comparing themselves to settled groups. Additionally, INGOs who provide funding should also be considered a significant contributor to this perception.

8. Implications

It is important to heed Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson's (1980) warning that "no features of culture or social organization are common to all nomads" (p. 18) and any attempt to replicate nomadic education must take each context into consideration and adapt appropriately. Where a diverse range of communities, genders, languages, and economic conditions are treated homogeneously the stated goals of NGOs will most likely go unmet and the expectations of local communities will surely continue to go unaddressed. The current demand on NGOs and local governments to demonstrate immediate and country-wide impact limits their ability to investigate local needs and expectations, thus making it nearly impossible to cater to their specific context. This lack of focus on the local level contributes to a loss of identity for nomads, and perhaps many other minority groups. Ironically, large-scale programs advocating for education

as a tool for self-determination can end up using education as a weapon to eliminate diversity and stifle local voices.

Additional research is required on the Bakarwal specifically and the global nomadic community in general. For the Bakarwal this includes: a longitudinal analysis of the BMS program, ethnographic research on a more representative population from the community, and an examination of the sedentarization process as experienced in northern Pakistan. I also join the ranks of those calling for further research into innovative methods of including nomadic groups in educational services. It is my hope that this study will provide a foundation for future research in these areas.

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