



A Case Study on Low Academic Achievement Among the Schools of Samtse Dzongkhag

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Abstract

This study looks at the persistent issue of low academic achievement in schools in Samtse Dzongkhag, Bhutan, where performance levels have consistently fallen below national averages despite ongoing educational reforms. A quantitative research design was undertaken by collecting data from 172 teachers from 35 schools in urban, semi-urban, and rural settings. The study sought to identify the primary causes of poor academic performance and to propose targeted interventions. The findings show that various factors, including teacher shortages, insufficient teaching and learning materials (TLMs), limited curriculum resources, and a lack of support staff, all impact instructional quality. Furthermore, the study identifies weak parental involvement and limited student interest as important non-institutional factors influencing the outcome. Language barriers exacerbate the problem, especially in communities where local dialects differ from the instructional languages, English and Dzongkha. The findings show a strong link between human resources, curriculum adequacy, community vitality, learner readiness, and linguistic competence in shaping student achievement. Understanding the factors that led to its deficit can help bring improvement in the overall performance of the children. This finding can aid schools in outperforming academically and bringing positive correlation in academic coordinates at the dzongkhag level. Further, it will help to bring various stakeholders' attention to work for the benefit of the students. The study suggests a few actionable recommendations that the Dzongkhag administration and education authorities conduct a mixed-methods follow-up study, enhance teacher professional development, strengthen mentoring systems, improve curriculum support, and encourage stronger home-school partnerships. By addressing these issues, Samtse schools can gradually close the academic gap and improve the district's overall educational standards.

Keywords: Low Academic Achievement; Samtse Dzongkhag; Bhutan; Teacher Shortage; Curriculum Materials; Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs); Learner Readiness; Parental Involvement; Community Vitality; Language Barrier; Rural Education; Quantitative Study; Academic Performance

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental pillar for nation-building, enhancing its socio-economic development and individual empowerment. However, in Bhutan, academic performance in rural regions remains significantly lower compared to the urban counterparts. Disparities in academic success between rural and urban areas persist, raising questions about equitable access to quality teaching and learning. Some reports indicate that students in the countryside consistently underperform despite efforts and

strides being made (Ministry of Education, 2022). Statistical evidence highlights the obstinate gap in the educational achievement between urban and non-urban zones (Ministry, 2022). Similarly, Samtse Dzongkhag's academic performance has been a matter of concern for half a decade. Bhutan's Annual statistics present Samtse District's lower pass rates compared to almost all other districts in the country (Ministry, 2022). This trend is accentuated by factors such as limited parental involvement, insufficient teacher training, and socio-economic challenges (Rinzin, 2020). According to the

National Statistics Bureau 2024, Samtse has 13000 students, and as per the BCSEA 2023 performance report for classes VI, VIII, X, and XII shows that Samtse stands at the bottom level. So, having gone through various statistics, it was learnt that Samtse Dzongkhag’s academic performance consistently lies below other Dzongkhags. Thus, this study is initiated to examine and assess the cause and provide suitable interventions accordingly.

Research question

What are the most significant factors contributing to low academic performance, and how could schools in Samtse Dzongkhag help achieve above other Dzongkhags?

Sub Questions

- How far does human resources dominate the student performance in the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag?
- To what degree do factors such as curriculum materials and learner readiness affect students’ academic success in Samtse Dzongkhag?
- To what extent do language barriers and less parental involvement affect learners’ academic success in Samtse Dzongkhag?

Literature Review

Human resource shortage

Teacher shortages in Bhutan, especially in rural areas, greatly impact academic performance. Wangchuk and Dorji [1] conducted interviews with former teachers and found that understaffing leads to heavy workloads, which harm instruction quality in the classroom. Another study by Sherub and Schuelka (2019) notes that remote schools face serious shortages of teachers. This situation leads to multi-grade teaching, which ultimately contributes to lower academic performance. Additionally, Gyeltshen [2] further supplements that challenges from teacher shortages manifest as classroom adjustments and reliance on substitutes or untrained teachers, which negatively affect performance. In a similar vein, Dendup and Dukpa [3] discovered that schools with too few teachers had significantly lower pass rates in board examinations. Shortages in specialized subjects like mathematics and IT hinder effective curriculum implementation, which further decreases academic performance, as stated by Tshering and Dorji [4]. International research by Zeitlin [5] in Rwanda also highlighted that high teacher turnover results in a decline in student learning. Therefore, teacher shortages show a consistent trend of diminishing academic performance both internationally and in Bhutan.

Curriculum materials

Curriculum relevance and the availability of effective teaching and learning materials are essential for student performance. Ahmed, Baloch, and Karim [6] found that teaching learning materials significantly influences performance in the government pry school. Tshewang (2020) revealed that Bhutanese classrooms lack a variety of visual aids, manipulatives, and interactive materials, which hinders a better learning atmosphere. In rural Samtse, Dorji, Zangmo, and Norbu [7,8] found that the lack of reliable internet was one obstacle to accessing online resources easily. This has greatly affected the quality of curriculum delivery.

Community vitality

Community involvement plays an important role in improving academic outcomes in Bhutanese schools. Gurung, *et al.* [9] found in their study that effective parent-teacher interaction, parental confidence, and supportive home environments significantly boost students’ academic performance. Som Bdr Mongar [10] further observed that parents mostly participated in fundraising and manual work but were rarely involved in educational planning or learning support. This limited engagement in academics indicates an unused opportunity for community support that, if tapped into, could enhance school-based learning. Together, these studies show that community support in Bhutan usually focuses on extracurricular activities or maintenance roles, while meaningful academic support is lacking. Strengthening parental confidence and creating formal channels for academic involvement would be essential for maximizing community potential in improving student learning.

Learner’s interest

Learner readiness, which includes cognitive, emotional, technological, and self-regulatory aspects, plays a vital role in academic success. In online learning environments, Lin, *et al.* [11] found that online learning readiness, which covers technical, communication, and social skills, significantly predicts engagement and achievement. Their multivariate analysis showed that strong learning readiness leads to better learning outcomes. Similarly, Wang, *et al.* [12] discovered that for high school students, both online readiness and emotional competence positively influenced academic performance during virtual schooling related to the pandemic. Finally, Chorrojprasert [13] pointed out that readiness, which includes students’ intellectual character and self-regulation, is essential in language education. The argument is that ready learners are more effective and motivated.

Language

Language plays a pivotal role in deciding students’ academic success. If educators and students do not share a language of instruction, communication is impaired, and this typically results in misunderstanding, disengagement, and academic failure. Mastery of language is the basis of academic success, but if students are linguistically challenged, their performance in other subjects is significantly affected. Several foreign researchers traced this relationship; yet, Bhutan presents substantial localized data. Sonam et al. (2023) investigate secondary students’ English attitude in southern Bhutan, finding that negative attitudes, shaped by constrained classroom environment, low parental support, and poor community English exposure, were associated with poorer English performance and more general academic disengagement. In another study, Norbu [8] investigates the attitudes of teachers and students in Samtse and concludes that intrapersonal and institutional inhibitions while learning English dilute reading and writing skills, having indirect effects on achievement throughout the curriculum. Similarly, Basnet, Gyeltshen, and Yangdon [2] report middle-secondary reading and literature results with minimal reading behavior and poor access to literary text in English listed as major causes of student underachievement. Phuentsho [14] depicts how bilingual (Dzongkha–English) instruction used at Grade 6 social studies improved understanding and interest significantly, demonstrating mother-tongue support benefits. Tamang, et al. [15] employ sentence translation exercises for Bhutanese students to show that balanced bilingualism (Dzongkha–English) permits more syntactic abilities, enabling broader academic language development.

Methodology

This study was intended to find out the reasons behind low academic performance in the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag. The research has adopted a quantitative research design to systematically examine the factors contributing to low academic performance in the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag. The study aimed to capture measurable data and perform statistical analysis to draw meaningful conclusions that can guide practical interventions. The research focused on all school teachers across Samtse Dzongkhag. Teachers were key informants as they are directly involved in the teaching-learning process and possess deep insights into the factors influencing students’ academic outcomes. A census approach was used, involving the participation of all teachers in the schools of the district. This method ensured comprehensive data coverage and minimized bias in the findings. A structured questionnaire was administered to all participating teachers. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items, addressing key variables such as human resources, community engagement, curriculum, and TLMs, learners’ readiness, and language barrier.

Ethical considerations

The ethical consideration was strictly taken care of throughout the research process to ensure the confidentiality of the participants by keeping the data confidential. Before the data collection, a written consent was sought from the district education office, followed by a request to collect data from the schools through the school head. The analyzed findings were also drawn from the data collected without deviating from the main source.

Result

This section presents the results of research focusing on quantitative analysis. The findings are basically focused on key areas and research questions that guided the investigation into low academic performance by the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag. The quantitative data were analyzed first with descriptive statistics and were further compared across the variables to understand more about issues, challenges, and recommendations. Descriptive statistics were taken considering the key variables such as Human resources, curriculum materials, community vitality, learners’ interest, and the language. The data were collected from 35 schools with 172 respondents. The responding schools were from urban, rural, and semi-urban while school ranges from extended classroom to higher secondary schools. Table No. 1 shows that out of 172 respondents, 51.7% were male and 48.3% were female, while Figure No. 1 shows that 31.4% are contract teachers and 68.6% are regular teachers. In the same line, the data revealed that the majority of the teachers are young graduates with 54.6% and with 16.9% as senior teachers (Table No. 2).

The study focused on six variables. Each variable consists of a minimum of three to eight statements. These statements were used to analyze the within and between the variables to present quantitative analysis.

Impact of human resources

This variable consisted of six statements which are used to study the impact of human resources on academic achievement through teachers and non-teaching staff. The analysis basically followed two components, i.e. required number of staff and the quality of staff, to determine the performance of the students. The Figures No. 2 and 3 on adequacy of teachers and non-teaching staff highlighted that there are shortages of both by 33% and 36.63% respectively. On similar ground, the data also showed that the Dzongkhag does not have qualified personnel to lead others by 26.75%. Further, it was found that about 19.18% of the teachers are not confident in teaching and assessment, which is perhaps due to the presence of contract teachers by 31.4%.

	No of years in service	Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage
Valid	0 -5 Yrs	94	54.6	54.6
	5+ - 10 Yrs	36	20.9	20.9
	10+ - 15 Yrs	13	7.6	7.6
	15+ Yrs	29	16.9	16.9
	Total	172	100	100

Table 1

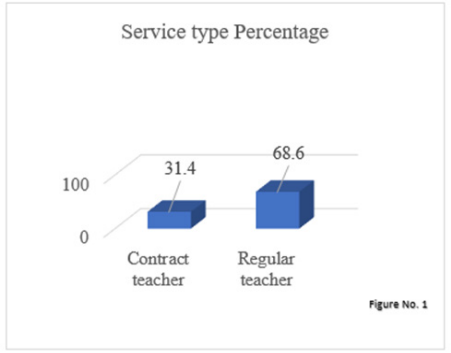


Figure 1

	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage
Valid	Male	89	51.7	51.7
	Female	83	48.3	48.3
	Total	172	100	100

Table 2

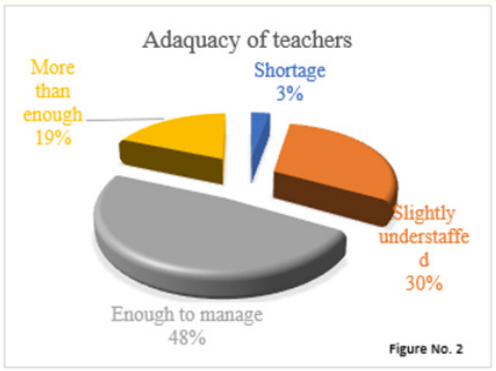


Figure 2



Figure 3

Curriculum materials

In this segment, there are seven statements covering curriculum materials to uplift academic performance. The statement is intended to find out whether the schools are equipped with curriculum materials that are a primary component of teaching and

learning. The table No. 4 below indicates that the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag are not fully equipped with curriculum materials by 49.2% (inadequate and partially adequate), while 47.7% of the schools are without a science laboratory (Table No. 5), compromising the practical learning environment.

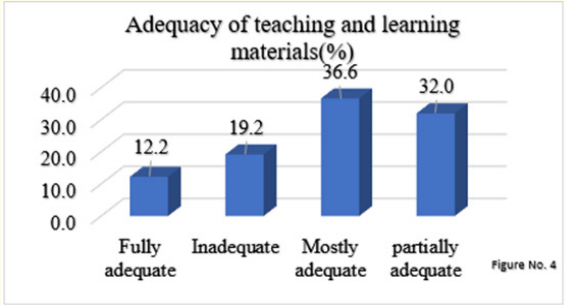


Figure 4

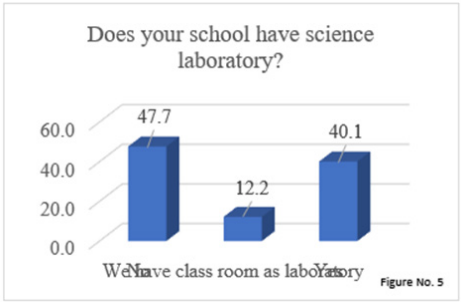


Figure 5

Community vitality

Community vitality consists of three statements to draw the support rendered by the parents, particularly on the academic strand. The school parents seem exceptionally good, 83.2% (good, very good and excellent); however, parents' communication with

teachers indicated that almost 82% of the parents come into contact with the teacher only when called on (Figure No. 6). Beyond the four walls of the classroom, it is the duty of parents to provide necessary support for academic performance, but data indicate that 60% (Figure No. 7) of parents are not concerned.

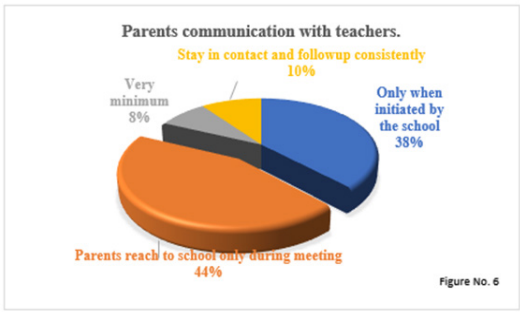


Figure 6

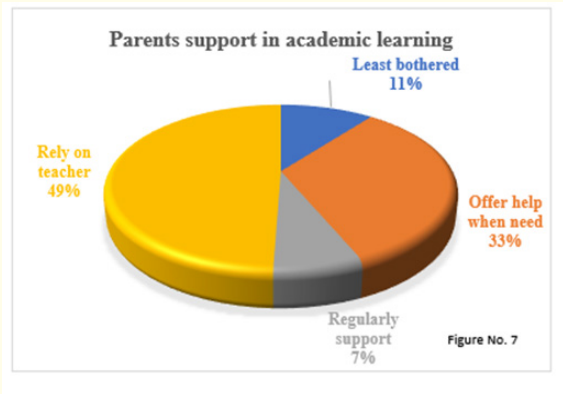


Figure 7

Learner interest

The learner’s interest was also assessed through the teacher’s perspective in combination with absenteeism. According to Table No. 8, the data showed a lack of significant interest in studies.

Further, Table No.9 with 61.6% indicated that absenteeism is another factor that causes low performance.

Language

The use of proper language, perhaps, affects the teaching and learning for both. The survey data as per Figure 10. 69.7% of students are struggling to understand the concept, while Figure 11 reflects that a language barrier exists for 62.2%.

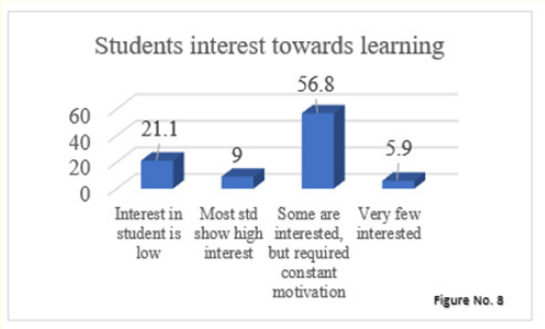


Figure 8

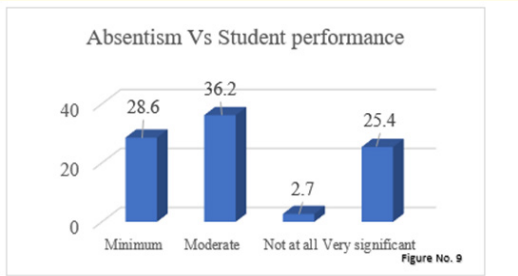


Figure 9

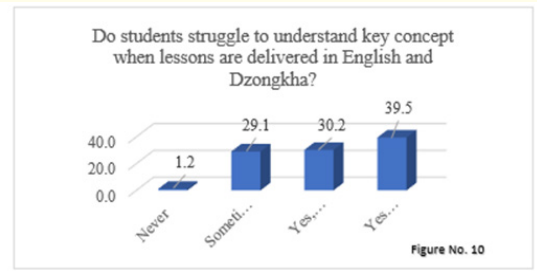


Figure 10

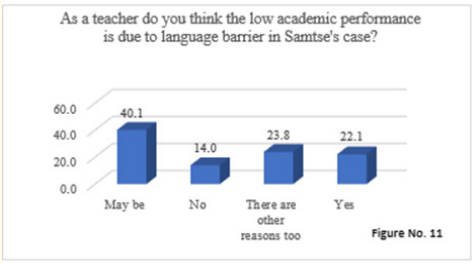


Figure 11

Discussion

This segment discusses the major outcome of the study by interpreting data in relation to the research questions while connecting them with the existing literature for validation. Further, this section also outlines the recommendations, limitations, and future areas of research that might help to consolidate better results.

Human resource

The finding confirmed that the human resources, in terms of teachers and support staff, are essential for academic outcomes. The data pointed out that for every three schools, one school is in short supply of teachers and support staff in the Dzongkhag, and without qualified teachers to lead others by 26%. The data significantly revealed that the low academic performance is due to human resource shortage, which is in line with the literature. Further literature also supported that 1/3 of the teachers are under contract, which has a negative impact on performance. Thus, consistent low academic performance by the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag is attributed to human resources.

Curriculum

The important component of the school is the curriculum. The curriculum material must be made available to the learners. The study showed that more than 50% of the schools do not have sufficient curriculum materials. Schools equipped with a laboratory also provide better learning opportunities; however, schools under Samtse Dzongkhag pointed out that nearly 50% do not have a proper laboratory. The literature pointed out that there is a strong correlation between performance and availability of curriculum materials, which is perhaps one reason for having low performance by the schools of Samtse Dzongkhag.

Community support

According to the study conducted by Gurung, *et al.* [9] and Mongar [10] found out that the effective support for students in their academic areas will have a great deal of positive impact.

While this study indicated that there is strong support rendered by the parents, parents' communication mentions otherwise, since 82% of parents come into contact with teachers for academic support (60%). So with this significant difference, schools of Samtse need to work effectively with parents to move along with the other Dzongkhags in terms of academic performance.

Learner's interest

Teachers and parents are very concerned about the academic performance of the students, as they often show interest in studies. This study also revealed that a significant number of students are not interested or have low interest in studies, which comes to 84.8%. In the same line, perhaps due to low interest, absenteeism (53%) is seen as another major factor that is the cause of the low academic performance of the students. Teachers of Samtse have a lot to do to boost and motivate students' interest, as indicated by Chorrojprasert [13].

Language

Samtse is located in the south of the country, where most of the community uses local dialects as a mode of communication. On the contrary, teaching and learning happen only in Dzongkha and English as a medium of instruction. The language barrier was identified as a possible reason for low academic performance, and it turned out to be true through this study. About 2/3 of the respondents reported that a language barrier is a possible factor, which is in line with the literature [16-23].

Implication of the study

The outcome of this study offers insight to all the teachers, educators, policy makers, and school leaders. The teachers play roles of all the stakeholders, and their primary duty lies in their hands from motivating students to seeking parental support for performance enhancement, besides character development. It also opens the eyes of our educators and leaders, where they can invest in teachers to boost academic performance through targeted professional

development programs. Furthermore, more leadership plays a vital role in bridging the gap through different stakeholder and consultative meetings, which have to be given due consideration by management.

Limitations of the study

The study received various supports from teachers and leaders of Samtse Dzongkhag, which ultimately could offer valuable insights. However, it also faced many limitations which has to be considered while taking the idea from this research. Firstly, the data were collected only from teachers, and the insights presented are from the perspective of teachers only. Secondly, the data were collected only from the teachers of Samtse Dzongkhag, so the result may not apply to other Dzongkhag having similar issues. Thirdly, the research was conducted using a quantitative method only, and the findings may not meet the expectations.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations may be proposed:

- Samtse Dzongkhag should carry out a comprehensive study involving greater participation from students and parents. The study should include mixed mode, i.e., qualitative and quantitative.
- Dzongkhag could also explore and provide immediate support in areas like professional development programs targeting newly recruited teachers. They should also work on and provide support staff wherever necessary.
- School leaders and senior teachers to work, guide, and mentor newly recruited teachers for better performance from their end.
- School leaders must work to have a mechanism so that parents will be on board in supporting the academic performance, besides supporting them in non-academic areas.

Conclusion

The study on low academic achievement in Samtse Dzongkhag reveals that the district’s persistent underperformance is primarily caused by a combination of human, material, social, and linguistic factors. The lack of qualified and motivated teachers, further fueled by a high proportion of contract workers, has a direct impact on teaching quality and student achievement. Similarly, insufficient curriculum materials, such as science labs and digital resources, act as a barrier to the learning process. Although some parental support exists, genuine academic engagement is limited, weakening the link between home and school. Furthermore, students’ disinterest and absenteeism, combined with significant language barriers in multilingual communities, continue to stymie learn-

ing progress. These findings support existing research indicating that academic success is dependent on the interaction of resources, readiness, and relationships.

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, and policymakers. Investment in teacher capacity building, effective mentoring of new educators, curriculum enrichment, and proactive parental collaboration are some of the important measures. Schools should also implement inclusive language strategies that acknowledge local linguistic diversity while improving English and Dzongkha skills. Finally, improving academic performance in Samtse is a shared responsibility to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all Bhutanese children, regardless of geographic location.

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