

Educational success and failure of learners from similar socio-cultural backgrounds: two life story interviews

Ambreen Shahriar, Goldsmiths, University of London

Email: a.shahriar@hotmail.co.uk

Tel: 07861544261

Abstract

This paper is based on life story interviews conducted for my PhD. The participants are two young men, Aqeel and Sarmad, with similar socio-cultural and educational background. Both men belong to rural and economically poor families of Sindh, the southern province of Pakistan. Both of them have very different academic achievements. Albeit both are in their late twenties, they have achieved a very different life status. Presently, Aqeel is at his village, and is unclear about his career whereas Sarmad is a senior officer in a private bank in the city of Karachi, Sindh. The paper discusses the journey through life of these two individuals, based on their life story interviews conducted by the present researcher. The data gathered through these interviews highlights circumstances and situations during the life of Sarmad and Aqeel when they had to take decisions, sometimes following their own choice and personal judgement, and sometimes driven by other circumstances when they had less control over their individual situations. Both of them talk fondly of their personal struggles through life, which seems to bring forth the reasons behind their present status. Apart from that the study shows the influence of family life, school life, village life, etc. on making my participants what they are, which, in turn, make them react in the way they do.

Key words: Life story interview, Pakistan, Academic achievement, Personal struggle.

Introduction

‘That was the time when I was in Matric and we asked one of our relatives for giving their daughter in matrimony to my second brother. But they refused mentioning that ‘Would we be getting our girls married to teachers or sons of (school) teacher?’ That changed my life. I became very ambitious about everything I wanted. In my life, I always started myself from zero and tried to reach the peak. I was so in English Department and in MBA as well. I became very ambitious after that incident. Even now, if I start something from

zero I can reach its peak. I have got this craze in me.' (From Sarmad's interview)

This is from the story of one of my participants gathered as part of my PhD study. This extract has special significance in my research and it is discussed several times in this paper.

This paper is based on the analysis of two life story interviews, which is the method of data collection. Within a wider ethnographic framework, for support in my choice, I would like to call upon Davies (2008:207), who says, 'ethnographers collect and study life histories not primarily out of interest in individual stories but in order to improve understanding and knowledge of social and cultural processes more generally'. As 'each individual set of life experiences is unique to a single person' (ibid), I would not like to over generalise, rather I would only aim to show life from the perspective of its participants.

2. Context – from the outside inwards

Sindh is the only diversely populated province of Pakistan, with its population consisting of a blend of people from all over Pakistan. With Sindhis as the natives, the province includes Seraikis, Balochs, Punjabis, Pathans, Bihari, Bohris, Ismailis, Kachhi-Memons, Ahmedis, Christians, fisherman-tribes, and above all, the Muhajirs. The province has a fine rural and urban population divide; with feudal, beauracrat, literary, business and working class people. Therefore, Sindhis coming from the villages to cities find it hard to cope with multicultural, multilingual and above all multi-ability society. The system of education is equally diverse with the presence of public and private educational institutions, running simultaneously with huge differences in standards of teaching and learning yet aiming at the same job market.

I decided to do research on the students coming to the University of Sindh from rural and economically weak backgrounds with Sindhi as their first language (L1). On the basis of these criteria I wanted to find out the reasons or the issues related to the success or failure of these students in university education.

3. Methodology and Methods

3.1 Research Tool:

Atkinson (1998:8) observes ' a life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it'. Therefore, 'doing research with first person accounts' (Riessman, 1993:17) of the participants' 'entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects' (Atkinson, 1998:8) became my main interest during this study. I preferred it because I wanted to understand the connections between truncated pieces in the lives of the participants that might be collected in structured interviews or in any other form of data collection where the researcher would be steering the talk through questioning. I expected that

'when the varied pieces of a life are consciously put together as a whole, we have a very purposeful, powerful document' (Atkinson, 1998:11). Hence, I asked participants to talk at great length about their life, and narrate their stories. This took the form of a 'Phenomenographic Interview', which aims at finding variations in the ways of experiencing different aspects of the world as faced by the researched.

I wanted to understand the 'truth' as reported by individuals living it. Goffman (1956) notes that people try to hide their true impressions regarding any situation when in public due to many reasons. I was interested in what the respondents did at certain times or in certain situations, what they showed and what they tried to hide, and also what drove them to do that, what came before some very important situation, what went through their mind during that situation, what they had been through to reach that situation and what, according to them, will follow if they will chose one rather than the other option.

3.2 Research Participants:

I conducted two life story interviews; the first from, Sarmad, a young man who successfully completed his university education and has a good job; the second, from another young man, Aqeel, who left university-education during his first year of study for certain reasons (the names of all individuals, participated or mentioned by participants, are changed for the sake of confidentiality). Both, Sarmad and Aqeel, have Sindhi as their L1 and are from rural Sindh with economically poor backgrounds, though financially Aqeel's family is comparatively better than Sarmad's. Sarmad is a gold medallist in his MBA and is currently working as a senior officer at a private bank in Karachi, whereas Aqeel left the university in his first year and is currently living in his village. He is doing a private B.A. for which he will not take any regular classes and is supposed to study at home on his own and will only have to appear at exams in one of the colleges that conduct such exams. He aims to get a job after acquiring this degree.

The ways through which I found these participants and arranged for the interviews with them are also important in the research. The first life story interview was from Sarmad. He was my student at the Department of English, University of Sindh, where he studied for two years before joining the Institute of Business Administration, at the same university, for his MBA. I contacted some of my old students while still in UK and requested them to arrange to contact Sarmad. I talked to him once I went to Pakistan, and he readily agreed to volunteer for the interview. He was living in a shared accommodation in Karachi so I arranged to meet him either at a suitable place for both of us.

The task of finding my second participant (an unsuccessful student) was quite difficult. I had been away from university and the students for two years, due to my studies in the UK. So I had to depend on my contacts (my former students) for finding a participant who would meet all the criteria. They found some people for me; a few of them agreed to give the interview but did not turn up on the day. Finally, one of my students, Shabbir, brought his cousin, Aqeel, to my place for the interview.

Aqeel was on my list (based on all the people my contacts suggested) since the beginning but he did not seem to be very eager to come for the interview. He never gave any specific date for the meeting despite repeated reassurances from me and Shabbir. Finally, when I requested Shabbir to arrange to find somebody else for my interview, as I had a very limited time left, he brought Aqeel. Aqeel started his university education in the Mass Communication Department where he got admission as an undergraduate student. But he left the university after two months. Aqeel knew since the beginning that I wanted to interview him because he left university studies. This was, certainly, a very difficult thing for him and that is why I can understand his reticence.

3.3 Researcher in the Research

My role in the research has significance and influence on the data gathered. I was, to my participants, a university teacher, whom Sarmad knew as his own teacher and Aqeel knew as the teacher of his cousin, Shabbir, who brought him for the interview, because I asked him to help me find somebody for my research. I tried to introduce myself differently to them but that only added to the gap between us. I told them that I was only a researcher in the first year of my study and I did not have much knowledge of what I was doing and I would be constructing everything on what they would tell me. Then they started looking at me as a PhD student in the UK. Thus, the power relation existed, however hard I tried.

3.4 Researched in the Research

At least one of my two participants, Aqeel, seemed to be very careful with his speech. An obvious reason behind such behaviour is not clear, yet, I had a feeling that he was not open, which could be either due to his position or my position in the research. Bhopal (2007), also, agrees that the researched can show their powerful status by withholding the information from the researcher yet she clarifies that still the researcher is usually more powerful with the pen, the clipboard and the tape-recorder on his side. While discussing the unequal researcher-researched relation with the power balance usually hanging on the side of the researcher, she (2000:76) writes, 'our status as researchers often gives us power to initiate research: to define the reality of the 'other', to translate the social life and language of the 'other' in terms that may not be their own. In the final analysis, the researcher departs with the data and the researched stay behind, sometimes no better off than before.'

I could not promise any individual profit to my participants yet I did assure them that I hoped to provide far-reaching results for the society and the people the research concerned.

3.5 The Paradigmatic moment

Since the beginning of Sarmad's narrative I had a feeling that I was heading towards something. Sarmad's interview seemed to be the right start for my data collection.

Sarmad started by mentioning that few people in his village are educated. And in such a village, his father is a school teacher who wanted to get his children as much education as he could afford within his financial restrictions.

‘But when we used to go to school, we did not have many things which any student would need. During my primary education we were not provided with our basic requirements like books or pens or other things. I used to feel sorry at my condition because I was very keen on studying, right from my childhood.’

Within these first few sentences of his story, Sarmad had already provided me with three themes:

- Influence of environment
- Influence of parents’ education
- Influence of parents’ or family’s financial standing

The comparison of these three themes in Sarmad’s life gives insight into several questions and in his next few sentences, he discussed the most important incident of his life about his relatives, which I have used to open this paper and again analysed in the narrative analysis. Those were the most important moments of the entire interview. His strong tone and his enthusiastic style revealed his personality while he was repeating that incident. At the end of the interview when I asked him if there were any other incidents that had influenced his life, he repeated (it sort of becomes a refrain throughout his story), ‘Yes, the incident that I mentioned earlier as well. That was the time when I was in Matric and we [family] approached one of our relatives for their daughter’s hand for one of my brothers. But they refused saying they did not want to get their girls married to a teacher’s son. That changed my life...’ and he continued narrating the story which shows the significance of the incident in his life. When I finished recording, I gave the recorder to him to listen to the whole interview. He started listening but turned the recorder off very soon and just asked me if that incident is important for me or else he would like it not to be used. When I mentioned that it was very important but that I would use it only if he would allow me to, he allowed it.

4. Findings

My participants talked keenly about such personal struggles which seemed to me to be more important in bringing them to their present state than the broader and bigger questions like politics, language and the feudal system, which might ultimately be my themes.

The problems experienced by the participants appear more of an individual nature. Sarmad and Aqeel were discussing problems they faced as individuals and not as members of a group, yet these individual issues may by the end of the study develop some collective (class or linguistic group) issues. This study made one thing clear to

me: that I was studying individuals, and not systems; that it was the problems confronted on individual grounds that were to be discovered. Although these individual issues can combine to challenge the system yet this cannot be predicted at this time.

The questions that my participants raise, through their life history narratives, seem to be moving towards the following, which I have discussed in detail in later sections:

- Motivation-intrinsic and extrinsic.
- Responsibility versus Rights.
- Struggle to be included/accepted.

In the following sub-sections, I will be doing narrative analysis of selected passages, followed by the discussion of patterns found from the data that separate the two participants.

4.1 Analysis of the Narrative

'Interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction.' (Bourdieu, 1990:81)

The narratives of my participants, when put on paper in the form of transcription, lost their life. They became as dead as the paper they were put on. Thus, following Labov (1972; cited in Cortazzi, 1993) I also chose to do narrative analysis, which is expected to observe their individual styles of telling their stories, to put as much life in them as I can. Those were life stories of living people and I preferred to analyse some of their excerpts in order to make the life through their stories clear to myself and my readers. 'Narrative analysis relates events and actions to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot' (Polkinghorne, 1996:16).

Labov's model has been my choice following Cortazzi (1993) and Kearney (2003). Labov seeks Aristotelian characteristics of an ideal tragic plot in the narratives of the research participants. Cortazzi (1993:45) presents Labov's model in the form of following table.

Table: 1 The Structure of Narrative in the Evaluation Model

STRUCTURE

Abstract

Orientation

Complication

Evaluation

Result

Coda

QUESTION

--- What was this about?

--- Who? When? What? Where?

--- Then what happened?

--- So what?

--- What finally happened?

Following my narratives, I would agree with Cortazzi (1993), Reissman (1993) and Kearney (2003) that most narratives contain most of these elements yet they are used in different ways, sometimes some are omitted and in others some are repeated which explains individual styles.

4.1.1 Extract 1: Sarmad on 'Money Matters'

In the following extract, Sarmad talks about his financial problems. It is a story within a story, beautifully scripted by Sarmad. I chose this among the extracts from the narratives because it highlights one of the very important themes of my present work. He is, through this story, telling about the importance of money in his household and in the world around. But more than that, he is telling about how he (or his family) is excluded from society due to his financial standing resulting in his entire life being an effort to overcome this.

Orientation

1. My father was a school teacher and the only person supporting our family of 12.
2. All of my brothers wanted to study but my father's income was meagre and we had to face many problems.

Exposition

1. Definitely as a teacher when he was looking at his family, he not only wanted to provide us with food but all necessities of life, like medicine, education and others.
2. He tried to provide us with everything possible for him.

Complication

1. But when we used to go to school, we did not have many things which any student would need.
2. During my primary education we were not provided with our basic requirements like books or pens or other things.

Evaluation

1. I used to feel sorry at my condition because I was very keen to study from my childhood.
2. Besides, whenever there arose any problems I used to feel

sorry for my father and my brothers because the only cause of all our problems was our finances.

Result

Abstract	I found that people honour those who have money.
Orientation	Even relations matter only if you have money and you are financially sound.
Complication	I really felt bad seeing that. One of my brothers was to get married to my cousin but they refused, mentioning that, 'Would we be getting our girls married to teachers or teacher's children?'
Result	That really disheartened me. I felt very bad.

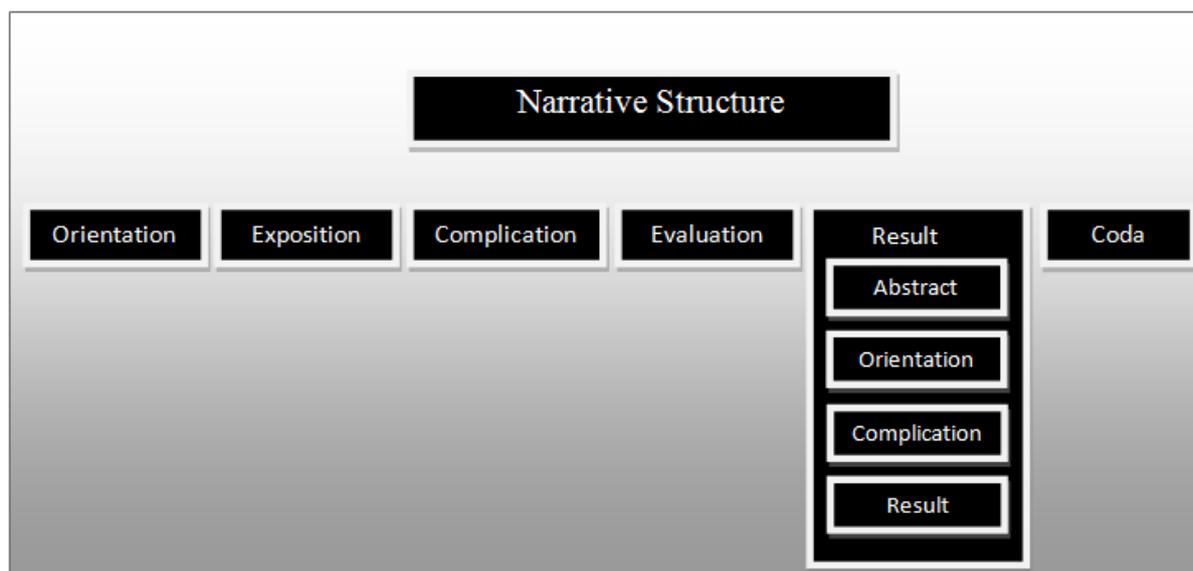
Coda

That encouraged me to study and I decided to study and reach a position of respect in society.

Sarmad starts without any prior notification of what he is going to talk about. His story begins with answering all those 'WH' questions (e.g. what, where, why, who) which any listener would like to be answered if they were not addressed in the first attempt. After setting the scene, he prefers to provide some detail. Because it is this detail which actually takes us to the problem, i.e. his father wanted to provide his children with everything possible and that is why the problem regarding schooling and finances arose. If he had not thought of getting them good education, none of these problems would have arisen. But he decided to educate them, because he was a school teacher himself, and the use of 'definitely' shows its importance. The participant uses the English word 'definitely' during the interview (in Sindhi) as well. When Sarmad comes to discuss the results of all the family problems, he could not have done that better than describing them in the form of another story, again very beautifully woven. And this time, since he is leaving one story in its midst and starting another, he is telling us in the beginning about what is going to happen in the story (in the form of an abstract), which makes the reason for starting a new story before finishing the earlier clear. With this little story, he provides the results of the actual story and gives the same conclusion for both the stories.

The above story can be modelled as:

Table 2: Model of Narrative Structure



4.1.2 Extract 2: Aqeel on 'Corporal Punishment'

Where Sarmad is motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically, Aqeel is motivated neither intrinsically nor extrinsically. Presence or absence of extrinsic motivation is more valued than intrinsic motivation throughout the two life stories which makes the significance of extrinsic motivation visible. Aqeel describes his lack of extrinsic motivation in the following extract where he is asked about his school, studies, teachers and first memory of school:

Abstract	The schools in our village are <u>just okay</u> .
Complication	If we were absent, nobody asked us the reasons why.
Exposition/Explanation	Elsewhere, when you run away from school, they stop you straight away (in childhood), hold you accountable, even beat you.
Evaluation	But nobody said anything to us in our school.
Exposition/Background Knowledge	Till 5 th class, we had a teacher who used to beat us, thrash us, and also teach us. We were scared of him and that is why used to go to school.
Result	But from 6 th to 8 th , for three years we just had no real

education.

Coda

Rather we did not study at all.

Aqeel finishes his story with the first sentence of his interview: 'My family has been very good to me since my childhood'. This remark is repeated many times throughout his interview. With this remark he made it clear what he is going to tell during the rest of the narrative. Yet this first sentence does not reduce the interest in the rest of the story, it increases it. He describes his family and continues as follows:

'Although I studied well for the first four or five years of my schooling, I was never interested in going to school for the sake of studies. When we used to go to school we would usually leave the books there and go out. That is how my studies continued till Intermediate [equivalent of A Levels]. I never thought about education. My family used to encourage me to study. The environment in our village was like we were doing sports all the time; it was a very bad environment. I followed the trend. That is why I could not study well even when I was doing Intermediate. Although I got admission in the university and I attended classes for a few days as well. I went through the process of introduction, etc. But when they started presentations and the teachers started to teach/explain in English or Urdu, I could not understand well. My base was not strong. I could not understand anything. I did not know what to do? What would happen next? How would I continuing my studies? I could not understand the lectures in English. I never studied English or anything sincerely/eagerly ever. I did not know English at all. Then I realised it was better to leave university instead of costing my parents a lot of money for my studies. I could not study and returned to the same environment of my village.'

On asking if he is happy now, he shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Happy... well... parents still ask me... [to rejoin education]'. I wanted to know what else he had to tell about his present situation of leaving university and returning home, to which he was referring as being 'just okay'. I realised that now he is going to give me a real reason for not studying and he did in the form of above passage (the one that is analysed). He did expose the conflict in the very next sentence (If we were absent [in school], nobody asked us the reasons). Without providing any introduction or orientation, he presented the problem. Aqeel explains it, not just for the listener but for himself as well (elsewhere, when you run away from school, they stop you straight away (in childhood), hold you accountable, even beat you). This explanation seems more like a reassurance to himself that whatever he did, i.e. left university, was the only possibility in his circumstances. His evaluation adds to his reassurance, that his present status of education resulted because nobody questioned him or punished him when he was in school. And the background knowledge that he provides about his past when things were not like that are focussed on reassuring the listener. This is by telling that when corporal punishment was given he used to study, so the fault lies with the teachers who stopped paying interest by allowing the students to follow their hearts' desire. Therefore Aqeel is missing extrinsic motivation i.e. learning for external reasons (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003), which was gained through corporal punishment in his case. Aqeel seems to hand the responsibility to someone

else for the only time during his entire narrative. Otherwise, he is always accepting his share of responsibilities for his present state, without ever blaming anybody and even asking for his right to be accepted as he is, regardless of his academic status.

4.2 Patterns that Separate

'It is undoubtedly true that learners bring many individual characteristics to the learning process which will affect both the way in which they learn and the outcomes of that process' (Williams and Burden, 1997:88). While reading Kearney's *The Monkey's Mask* (2003), I found that he was looking for patterns that connected all his participants. But I realised that since my participants share similar socio-cultural backgrounds, it could be assumed that they are similar (or they are connected), yet they ended up with different results in their lives. Some of them are successful in their education and practical lives whereas others just gave up everything. Through my study, I am trying to explore the reason behind these different results my participants received or chose for themselves. I would like to explore the individual differences occurring due to the personal, social, economic and educational differences of my participants in order to make the data more comprehensible, clearer and comparable. And when their differences are highlighted, their differentness will be explored.

4.2.1 Personal differences:

While discussing the development of personal identity through the influences, environment, circumstances and experiences, Parekh (2008) finds that human beings are subject to countless individual experiences in life; the personal attitudes towards those experiences build their personality. Here, I would like to discuss various traits of the personalities of the two participants as shown in the data.

From the very beginning of their interviews, tonal, attitudinal, and confidence differences are visible in the two participants which could lead to the 'cause and effect' of problems. Sarmad is in the driving seat right from the start whereas Aqeel takes the back seat and is willing to be driven by me. Sarmad has things to tell so he carries a positive, confident tone; his long, endless narrations express his pride and his confidence in what he is and what he has attained in life. His success has given him a positive approach towards life even towards negative incidents in his life, as he says 'one learns from them'. He made it clear that he has succeeded due to his own unending effort. His father, with his meagre salary, was the only provider to a family of twelve. His elder brothers could not support him. Thus, anyone else in his place might not have struggled for so long. 'People hardly have the courage to face such problems'. On the other hand, Aqeel is less expressive and lacks self-confidence. His short phrases, one-line answers, like when asked who paid his monthly expenses, he replied 'My father gives me everything and my mother'. His hesitation to speak on his own (he rather wants to be questioned, 'ask me, I will reply to whatever you ask'), makes his under-confidence visible.

Although Sarmad used to think, 'When others have books why not me?' he mentions that he took to bear this burden of pains himself and never blamed his father or even 'told him my concerns'. His thirst for knowledge is yet unquenched. He wants to progress even further, study more and win the Nobel Prize. Self-confidence, self-contentment and self-satisfaction are at their best. Aqeel, on the other hand, blames the village environment, the teachers who did not make him accountable and of course his own lack of interest in studies.

4.2.2 Social differences:

Human relationships and the roles played due to those relationships, as a member of a family, a group, a community, a society, give birth to social identity and humans categorise themselves and each other on the basis of such identities (Parekh, 2008). The social identity, along with personal identities discussed above, differentiates individuals (from a variety of social settings) coming to the same setting of a university. Aqeel's is a bigger village with more people travelling to cities for various purposes, yet only a fourth of the population is educated. Sarmad's on the other hand, is a small village with 10-20% educated people. Very few people from Sarmad's village come to universities for education. This means that he even had little knowledge of life outside the village, which was also clear from his surprise at the daily expenses in the boys' hostel at the university.

Both the participants show a positive attitude towards their families. For Sarmad, his father, who tried hard to provide the best he could to his children, is his 'inspiration' and his mother, who is no doubt uneducated, 'but she is the best. I mean the way she has brought us up, the way she cares for us, she is like my Paradise'. Likewise, Aqeel makes it very loud and clear since the beginning of his story that his family 'has been very good to me since my childhood. I have three brothers; they are good to me and so are my parents. I have two sisters; they are good to me too. My family is very nice from all angles. We live together with love and affection towards each other'. Throughout his interview, it is quite obvious that his family, both his parents and his siblings, are very good, they live with love and affection and they are a happy family. Besides, his relation to uncles, aunts, cousins, and all villagers is very good. They are a happy family, a happy village.

Where Sarmad has his father keenly interested in getting as much education for his children as possible, Aqeel's father is at his job for at least five consecutive days without coming home to his children. Yet whenever his father was at home, he took him to school. Aqeel's mother is a working woman as well; a teacher who has to look after the household after work and who was not very strict towards Aqeel's education. Both of these factors resulted in Aqeel running away from school and coming back home where aunts never asked him to go back to school. Despite that, Aqeel is quite thankful to his aunts for taking care of him and his siblings when their mother is at work. Aqeel, thus, feels that if his father had been at home daily or his mother had not been a working woman, he would have been sent to school forcibly.

Unlike Aqeel's entirely positive views about all the relatives and his villagers, Sarmad finds jealousy in the society and notes that 'people are not happy when they see others being successful in their lives.' Aqeel does not seem to experience any such behaviour, perhaps because he could not attain that successful status. Sarmad's are mixed experiences with the world around. He can recall very good friends at the university who sometimes paid for his lunch and helped him in getting tuition which solved his financial problems. But Aqeel lacks such rich participation in life, of experiencing its so many unique moods.

The village environment is not very healthy and supportive as is clear from the statements of both Sarmad and Aqeel. But Aqeel took the deep influence of it and says 'the surroundings were not encouraging in the village. It has a very little number of educated people ... It is all about the surroundings then. I followed the band wagon. I spent all day playing, running here and there'.

The feudal system has also left its effects on the lives of those experiencing its everyday traumas. Aqeel mentions an incident when the lords of the village had a tussle with his family over a piece of land belonging to Aqeel's family. This is one of his worst memories. Aqeel also plays for his village's Volleyball team. When asked about who the captain of their team was, he said it is Nazir, because he is the son of the village's richest landlord, and he giggles. Sarmad also talks of the impact of the feudal system in Pakistan, 'the landlords do not want the poor to be educated because if the poor will be educated then the landlords will lose their significance.'

4.2.3 Economic difference:

'In this world, man worships money', says Sarmad. 'The only cause of all our (Sarmad's family) problems were finances' and 'even relations matter only if you have money and you are financially sound'. The twice quoted incident of his relatives calling his brother 'a school teacher and son of a school teacher' hurts Sarmad's self-respect. This little story has a great significance in his life. He mentions that it keeps haunting him specially, whenever he has to take any important decision in life. He left the English Department because he did not want to hear the same words by adopting teaching as a career. Surprisingly though, he still wants to be a teacher but would prefer to teach part time. Besides, he smiles while mentioning that the same relatives are now very keen to marry one of their daughters with him, which of course is due to his present job and status.

His deprivation affected his thinking, 'God gave me intelligence, understanding, brains but I could not do my heart's desire due to certain things'. His father had problems raising his children, all of whom wanted to study, due to his small income. Thus, Sarmad lacked even the basic requirements like books and pens when at school and 'I used to take just one meal or have two samosas for the whole day' when at university. But he made an effort to earn money to solve his problems through giving tuitions while still at university. Though he had to give away a lot of his precious time which in the absence of that problem, could have been given to studies. Yet Sarmad was contented.

Money has not been Aqeel's problem. His parents do not have a criterion for giving money to their children. 'Whenever I need money and whatever amount, they give. Even now, though I do not study but if I ask for money, they give me'. As in case of Chambers' (1999) research, the motivation decreased due to lack of parental support and guidance, a similar finding was made here too, as parents did not take much practical interest in Aqeel's learning.

4.2.4 Educational differences:

Williams and Burden (1997:88), suggest that the researcher should focus on, 'how individual learners make sense of their learning situations in ways that are personal to them'. From my participants, Sarmad has realised the significance of education since his childhood. He fondly tells about the education of his brothers. Aqeel, as well, talks about the education of his siblings and shows satisfaction for their hard work. He seems to 'realise now' that education gives an understanding of life and of the world and regrets his lack of education through following statements,

- 'If I had studied then I were in university now and I would be expecting to get a good job in a good organisation. I would be able to study.'
- 'I would have done anything in the world, would have started my own school. I would be able to do anything on computer. Now I do not have enough knowledge or understanding, and I cannot do anything.'

Aqeel's realisation raises new questions and issues on motivation:

- Why after all is he now able to realise the significance of education?
- Why did he not have this realisation earlier?
- What went wrong or different in his life that turned him around?
- Who/what is responsible for this change in his attitude?

Motivation seems to be very high for Sarmad. His entire conversation is filled with phrases like, 'I was very keen to study from my childhood', 'I was never disappointed, never discouraged', 'All this forced me to work hard'; 'I was very regular and punctual and never missed a class'. According to him, his teachers were very talented and motivating. Comparing this to Aqeel clarifies the difference between them, Aqeel says, 'we used to go to school and we would usually leave the books there and go out. That is how my studies were till Intermediate. I never even thought about education'.

The incident of buying old newspapers and reading them just to improve his language skills is significant in Sarmad's learning. When people praised him for his knowledge and understanding, he used to get motivated. But when Aqeel was asked by his father and village friends not to leave the university, his reply was simple, 'I cannot study'. However, he takes the responsibility, and mentions that everyone asked him to study and his teachers taught at both school and university but he was not interested in his studies during childhood because 'after all a child gets attracted

to games only', see section 3.5.2- Motivation- Intrinsic and Extrinsic of this paper for questions rising from this and other such statements by Aqeel.

Aqeel felt that at university he was '12 years behind. The students studying at the university currently are much ahead of me.' He also mentions two of his cousins, Noor and Jalal, who used to study at school and home even without teachers or parents asking them. But he is satisfied with his decision to leave the university instead of wasting his parents' money, because he is not very hopeful about getting further education due to his weak early education. During his childhood, Aqeel wanted to be a police officer or join the armed forces, but he could not because his mother did not want him to. His mother made it clear to him that he is not allowed to follow any risk-seeking profession and also it is good if he gets a job around his village, otherwise he had better stay at home, without a job. Sarmad also, like Aqeel, clarifies that 'the boys from villages are directionless' and how the 'significant others' in their lives, like their fathers, uncles, elder brothers and other village elders, take the decisions for their lives. In Sarmad's case his father and brother decided that he should be a doctor. Yet they did not provide him for the basic necessities essential to get admission in MBBS, like adequate learning resources. He even mentions that he did not have books for Physics and Chemistry then.

Sarmad had his times of frustration as well because 'merit is not valued.' He used to think, during his college days, 'what country are we living in where there is no justice?' and after his job interviews which he could not qualify in, 'I found that hiring was done on a political basis'. Sarmad also has his demotivated time 'I used to think that I cannot go further, I cannot study much'. But unlike Aqeel it was due to his finances, which he eventually overcame.

5. Discussion on Themes arising from the Data

Their education and different attitudes to what came to them in life ended up in making Sarmad and Aqeel completely different people with a variation in their level of satisfaction, goal of life and attitude towards the future.

'When the researcher and the researched operate from shared realities, there may be a tendency to take too much for granted' (Bhopal, 2000:74). But I tried to develop a 'balance between rapport and distance' as suggested by Bhopal. She (2000:74-5) asks the researcher 'to use the nearness and involvement afforded by shared experiences to gain access and establish trust, but maintain whenever possible the distance and mystery of the 'stranger', in order to encourage a full account of the participant's experience'. By a closer examination of the data, in the light of both the different patterns discussed above and the narrative analysis of the interviews, the following main themes come to light.

5.1 Inclusion and Exclusion

The participants do not feel themselves included in the society on the whole at different levels. Both of them seem to be struggling to become accepted in society.

On the one hand Sarmad strives to be included in his society, among his relatives. His continued effort for more, for the best, is actually knowingly or unknowingly, an effort to be included. And he enjoys the fact that his relatives are now happy to give their daughter to him in matrimony. A real paradoxical situation to this arises when Aqeel feels excluded at the university, where he possibly could not find others of his mental standing. And therefore, he returned to his village. His greatest satisfaction is that of being included. His repeated assurances are for both himself and for me that he is happy and his family and relatives are good to him. Both the participants suffered from an inclusion-exclusion dilemma: if they are included in the village, they are excluded at the university but if they try to get included at the university, they are to be excluded at their villages. Though Sarmad seems to find his way through this dilemma, yet Aqeel struggles and ends up preferring one over the other.

- How far was Aqeel to be blamed for making such a choice?
- Did he have another way through his dilemma?
- Is it possible for all to swim smoothly out of such dilemmas as Sarmad did, or does it depend on their individual personal and social circumstances?

The issue of included and excluded is also visible in the village environment. The environment is quite strict, passive and static and is not easily adapted to the new life of education and learning. It has its set activities, set goals, set roles and thus its limited awareness. It is this village environment that both of my participants are more concerned about than anything else. They are part of that and feel comfortable and satisfied when they are accepted in those surroundings.

Along with other things, the feudal system is also an unchanging, unaccommodating reality. The Sindhi feudal lords, despite being rich and educated, hardly seem to take any visible action for the rights of their poor village folk. Rather, following Sarmad's prediction, they are worried about the revolution that might be instigated by the poor if they become educated.

Most importantly, my participants struggled to be accepted. And when one of them (Aqeel) found his likeliness to be included, rather rare, he ran away i.e. left university. It seemed to be the fear of being alone that haunted my participants. Their struggle is more of following the current, than of going against it. The motivation, in Sarmad's case, is also more extrinsic than intrinsic; and in Aqeel's case, it is the lack of extrinsic motivation, which he regrets. The idea is more comprehensibly explained under the next heading.

5.2 Motivation- Intrinsic and Extrinsic

Motivation, besides aptitude, determines the success and failure of a learner in any sort of learning, notes Dörnyei (2000, 2001), because it affects the degree of attention and effort invested by an individual on an act of learning. Extrinsic motivation is of key importance in case of both of my participants. In case of Sarmad, extrinsic motivation played a vital part in his growth, although he explains his achievements as 'where there is a will, there is a way'. Relatives' behaviour, lack of

resources, college teachers along with everything else negative or positive motivated him. Sarmad's will power to fight against the circumstances, his continuous efforts for studying despite having no books and pens, his decision to stay in the university despite his financial problems and his hostel's adverse environment, along with a number of other things could not stop him from getting education as he wanted to be somebody of importance some day. And this extrinsic motivation brought forward the result.

Aqeel looks for motivation, while discussing the lack of strictness in the class by the teachers, their negligence and carefree attitude towards children's inclination for learning. Aqeel mentions, 'now I cannot study, my time is gone' and at another place, he regrets that he cannot start a school at his village or use a computer due to his lack of education.

No doubt, motivation is a practical issue (Ushioda, 1996) and has serious consequences, both positive and negative, in case of my participants. And the motivational differences among the learners result in differences in their achievements.

5.3 Deprived by the System

The education system of Pakistan is weak and discriminating, which provides the rich with a better education and ultimately better living by better earning through better jobs (Rahman, 2001). There is a huge variation among students from different types of schooling coming to the university, as Aqeel said, 'but they (teachers) did not have to teach me alone. They had to teach the same to all (the students). The rest had studied till Intermediate and I did not study. They could understand what was taught to them but I could not'. Such a system provides the poor with no sense of right but only a sense of responsibility, where they do not realise that the fault lies with the education system rather than them. They think, 'the only problem was that I was weak in studies'. On the other hand, research (Oxford and Ehrman, 1993; cited in Williams and Burden, 1997) points out that the individual differences of learners need to be carefully dealt with for effective teaching. Aqeel remarks 'I could not study as they (the teachers at the university) were teaching to all (the students) alike and at the same time.' If this reason results on the one hand in Aqeel's personal failure, then on the other, it is the failure of teachers as well, for not recognising Aqeel and others having similar proficiency-level. This is because it seems totally unreasonable to think Aqeel to be the only student in his class with such proficiency.

This study highlights the influence of teachers who encourage and motivate students. Yet at the same time, it mentions the role of corporal punishment, and, according to Aqeel, its significance is undeniable. A good deal of criticism can, therefore, be laid on the education system at schools in rural areas, where children want to go to school when they are frightened of the beating by their teachers or else they will have no learning at all. A direct criticism of the education in Pakistani colleges comes from Sarmad, as can be judged from his interview:

- 'The government colleges in Pakistan do not have 100% satisfactory education or its better to say that only 25% satisfactory education is available and everyone has to take tuition for studying well. Besides it has become a part of the culture as the income of these teachers is so small that they want to supplement their income through earnings from tuitions.'
- 'At college, I noticed teachers only taught for money. They are not sincere towards their profession. Teaching was not done with sincerity, like, if we asked them to explain something, they would say, 'Better take tuitions then.' That was worst. I sometimes think what country are we living in, there is no justice here?'

Also, the co-education system at higher secondary level and the problems related to going to towns for examination are raised in the interviews. These might be amongst causes behind the small number of females in education apart from other social and cultural pressures. This, along with the others mentioned above, may prove to be important issues future study.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, two life story interviews taken from one successful and one unsuccessful student, are analysed and discussed. The data gathered through these interviews highlighted various circumstances and situations during the life of my participants where they had to take decisions at times either following their own choice and personal judgement, or being driven by the circumstances at others.

The various themes that the data highlighted include the effort of my participants to feel included and accepted in their native society. Apart from that, the role of extrinsic motivation in the process of learning is found along with the impact of the education system of the country and social circumstances on individual learners.

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