

Orphans Living in Orphanage: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Orphans living in an orphanage have the right to avail education like other children. They are provided education but often lack professionals, resources, guidance and counseling, individual support, and planning for learning at the orphanage. Academic related activities at a young age are a necessary requirement to advance in education and career. Developing study habit is very essential for orphans to advance in higher education. The present study aimed to explore the academic and general activities carried out by orphans, and the challenges and issues encountered by them in an orphanage. Purposive sampling technique was employed to achieve the objectives. An observation schedule and self-structured interview with caregiver, caseworker, orphans, and teacher were used to collect information. The major findings of the study are that orphans spent time watching TV, reading books, drawing and coloring, and helping younger ones during free time. Caregiver, case worker, and teacher consider orphans need continuous support, empathy, and intervention in the form of coaching, tuition, career guidance, and motivation from capable youths to assist the orphans in their daily academic work. This will build interest and confidence in studies, leading to willingness to develop a good study habit hence resulting in success.

Keywords: Activities, caregiver, caseworker, orphans, and teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Every child has the right to the necessities for developing into a responsible, healthy adult. Unfortunately, there are approximately 153 million orphans worldwide due to disease, epidemics, poverty, malnutrition, natural disasters, climate events, abandonment, and captivity. There are almost 30 million orphans and abandoned children living in India. Most of the 25 million children, who are primarily orphans live and work on the streets and are involved in drug trafficking, gang related violence, prostitution, and crime. Millions of children are living on the streets trying to survive, while orphanages are overcrowded with more orphans. It is reported that in Mizoram there are 807 orphans and vulnerable children covered under integrated child protection scheme. Out of these, 778 children are staying in children's home and 29 children under specialised adoption agency in need of support ranging from basic survival necessity to those that can provide a better and quality life such as education. Therefore, orphans require the support of community to improve their future life (Shrivastava, 2017; Directorate of Economics & Statistics, 2024; UAC, 2025).

Any children under the age of 18 who lost one or both of their parents are orphans. They grew in orphanage which is a home, institution, or system where these orphans are sheltered and nurtured. Orphanage is a public and residential institution created to provide care and protection for children whose origins is unknown, unable or unwilling to look after the children. Some orphanages hire professional such as nurses, teachers, and caregivers for care and fostering of these children. A child's overall growth and development depends on family life and the environments they come across. But, orphans in an orphanage faced various problems and challenges like neglect, abuse, lack of parental care and love, healthy food, school supplies, learning materials, and high labour demand (George, 2011; Poona et al., 2012; Barnett, 2025). Understanding them may benefit communities, school teachers, and people who care for these children towards success (Handerson & Milstein, 1996).

Caregivers in any orphanage are considered as mother substitutes because their responsibilities include meeting children's daily needs, providing emotional connection, and affection similar to a mother. Orphans who experience disappointment, fear, or unhappiness may have trouble concentrating on study and perform poorly. They are more likely to drop out of school than other students because they are prone to experience discrimination from teachers and other students (Denis, 2001; Case et al., 2004; Atwinea, 2005). Therefore, caregivers and teachers should support them by encouraging their active participation with other children in a planned inclusive program (Pal, 2016; Ismail et al., 2018).

Study habit is an adopted technique for studies whether systematic, efficient, or effective to attain mastery of the subject. It is a multidimensional concept that involves setting up strategies, scheduling routines, a definite time and place, a pattern for student's self-learning, and strictly following up on their academics. It influenced the academic, personal, and social adjustment of the students even beyond school. Some orphans face discrimination at school from peers as well as teachers, making them more likely to drop out from their school. Developing a good study habit among orphans is the responsibility of caregiver at orphanages for the success and future achievements (Azikiwe, 1998; Case et al., 2004; Crede & Kuncel, 2008; Islam, 2021).

Orphans with academic potential often experience frustration and academic failure, not due to a lack of competence, but as a result of poor study habit. Developing a good study habit is foundation to academic success, fosters a sense of competence, promotes positive attitudes, and form the basis for effective work practices in future occupation. Typically, teachers and parents collaborate to support children in cultivating good study habit. However, teachers, caseworker, and caregiver assume greater responsibility to develop good study habit among orphans. It is necessary to examine the factors influencing the development of study habit and to identify specific areas where these children require additional guidance (Fielden, 2005).

Rationale of the Study

Orphans living in an orphanage often lack of care, love, and emotional attachment that are needed for development. They are provided education through formal way of schooling. Any government or non-government organisation can set up an orphanage, providing resources and infrastructure that could help orphans develop creativity and knowledge for preparing in the highly competitive world. Developing a good study habit among orphans at a young age will shape, encourage, and give the confidence to perform better in academics and set higher goals for future. The present study intends to highlight the good academic practices being followed in the orphanage to help orphans more efficiently and effectively. Hence, the researcher is interested to explore the study habit of orphans, problems, and challenges encountered at an orphanage. This will help caregivers, teachers, and policymakers to handle and prepare effective policy for orphans care and protection.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A head of orphanage viewed, orphans cannot afford higher education. They are less likely than non-orphans to complete secondary school, so, they are encouraged to make academic progress and complete as much of their education as they can. Policies requiring orphans to leave at the age of after 18 may pose serious barrier to secondary school completion. Therefore, steps must be taken to lower educational barriers and raise school completion rates without discrimination (Herr, 2014; Apedaile et al., 2017).

Non-orphan students have a better study habit than the orphans. There is no significant gender influence on study habit of orphans (Poonia et al., 2012; Shahana, 2017). There is a relation between study involvement and the academic achievement of orphan. They have lower scholastic achievement than the non-orphans (Benson, 2002; Kumari, 2016; Pal, 2016; Shahana, 2017).

There is a significant difference of self-efficacy among orphans with respect to gender, class, and locality. Orphans are vulnerable to psychological issues. Behavioural problems are prevalent among orphans due to lack of parental care, love, affection, guidance, and unhealthy experiences in early life, resulting in unsocial behaviour (Aichhorn, 2010; Rosy, 2015; Venkatesan, 2015; Shahana & Singaravelu, 2016; Ushanandi & Gabriel, 2017; Kaur et al., 2018)

Orphans have higher adjustment than non-orphan students. A significant difference was found in the adjustment behaviour of orphans with regard to school type. Orphan and non-orphan do not differ significantly in emotional stability. However, orphans tend to be slight depressed compared to non-orphans. Educational intervention and institutional care can help orphans improve the quality of life, mental health, and developmental progress (Sparing et al., 2005; Kumar et al., 2013; Bhat, 2014; Cranab & Raja, 2014; Singh, 2016).

Previous studies deal with variables like psychological issues, behavioural problems, mental health, self-efficacy, academic performance, and psychological adjustment whereas the present study deals with in the context of academic activities like study habit and challenges faced by orphans in an orphanage, the responsibilities of caregiver and school teacher in developing study habit among the orphans.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the academic activities carried out by orphans living in an orphanage.
2. To explore the challenges and issues encountered by orphans living in an orphanage.

Method of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted at an orphanage in Siaha, Mizoram. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the secretary of the orphanage managing board. Informed consent was taken from participants of the study. The identities of all participants, including inmates, caregiver, caseworker, and school teacher were kept confidential to address ethical considerations. Data were collected by purposive sampling through informal interviews and direct observation of orphans. The sample consisted of eight participants, including inmates, caregiver, caseworker, and school teacher associated with the orphanage. Bullying is one factor for sample selection among orphans because some orphans faced bully while others are not. Some experienced anxiety mainly because of the personal and social factors. Hence, samples are selected purposively to represent the different nature of orphans. The interview questions addressed study duration, place, timing, regularity, enthusiasm of inmates during study hours, the academic performance of orphans, challenges encountered, and effective practices implemented to develop study habit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Case 1: Caregiver

Caregiver in charge of inmates' education claimed inmates in their system follow a study routine. They study for one and half hour in the morning and three hours at night. They study without complain, hesitation, and pressure indicating a good study habit. However, inmates who leave the orphanage lose the good study habits built in the orphanage due to lack of support and encouragement from relatives.

Inmates have a good space for study, proper lighting, free from noise and distraction. Even when there is no power supply they have power back up. Inmates are provided with all necessary school supplies. However, resources that could enrich them beyond textbooks like encyclopedias, charts, maps, general knowledge books are not available for them. Though provided with computer and internet connection, inmates prefer to use mobile phones of caregiver to solve academic related problem. Other than this, they are restricted from using mobile phone as it may have a bad influence. Television time is limited to movies and videos safe for inmates.

The school conducts test every Monday and Friday. So, they strictly follow the schedule for study. As a result, inmates do not have stress and fear due to exam and test. The normal study hour is extended during exam with snacks served in between to motivate them.

There are several problems and challenges in the care for inmates. Supervising fifteen inmates belonging to different class with all academic related tasks is quite challenging. Inmates could have improved faster if written test are conducted every study hour, however, it is impossible without assistance. Due to the limited educational level, the potential to teach Hindi, English, and Mathematics are limited. It is desired to have a new caregiver or a volunteer efficient to teach all subjects for academic growth. Theology and social work

students often turn up as internees providing help in the form of tutoring, career awareness, and motivation leaving a positive influence.

There was a time inmates are bullied in schools. They are motivated to stay strong and overcome any challenges through education. The intervention of school authorities and caregiver helped inmates attend school regularly without complains. There are cases when inmates are released with the request from relatives; but failed to provide care as in the orphanage resulting in drop out from school. Newly admitted inmates do not have a basic knowledge on alphabets and numerals they are supposed to learn at their level. Hence, they are admitted to a class most appropriate to their age.

Case 2: Caseworker

Inmates come from different background, mostly broken family. They were deprived from schooling, moral education, and etiquette. To shape the inmates, the orphanage has a daily routine. Study hour is scheduled in the morning and at night which all inmates should strictly follow with an exemption only for health reason. Hence, they are considered to have a good study habit.

The orphanage has a spacious study hall with tables and chairs to accommodate them all. Lighting is good, even in absence of power supply; back up is available for use. All inmates have complete set of books and accessories required for school. They have a mentor among office staff to help with homework and conduct oral test once they return from school. Though the time for mentoring inmates' academic work is limited due to the similar working and school hours, the active involvement of the caregiver at morning and night study hour enable inmates face test and exam without fear.

Inmates are strictly banned from mobile phone use and are comfortable without it. Computers are available for inmates, but are not taught of its use due to insufficient number for individual use which may result in jealousy and misuse. When internet source is needed for studies, they showed the important content only. Television is allowed only in the fixed time whose content is strictly examined by caseworker and caregiver. An educational resource to nurture creativity and critical thinking is needed for inmates learning.

The background and potential of inmates varies. Those admitted to their system before turning a school going age are sent to school at a right age without problem. But, those nurtured by relatives till school going age lack basic knowledge of alphabets and numerals maybe due to the absence of educational support and adult supervision. So they have to sit in a class lower than their age group. Following a strict study routine in the orphanage has improved the learning of inmates and is able to follow the lessons taught in school.

Inmates have a good academic performance except for one who due to a severe health issue and pandemic is unable to follow all the lessons being taught resulting in a poor academic performance. Those inmates who leave the orphanage due to several reasons do not receive the same care and routine followed in the orphanage resulting in poor academic performance. They are re-admitted to the orphanage with undesirable lifestyle creating problem to caregiver and caseworker.

A strict routine for study and screen time with adult supervision are the good practices followed in the orphanage. If this habit is followed and continued even after leaving the orphanage, inmates have the potential to achieve their goals.

Case 3: School Teacher

The completion of homework and activities on time, the good performance in test and the previous examination are indicators of a good study habit in the orphanage. Orphans are sociable and well-adjusted making friends easily. They attended the school regularly and punctually. There is no reported case for lack of interest in school indicating acceptance by school mates. They are given equal treatment with normal students to show inclusivity except for one orphan with poor academic record due serious health issue. Remedial teaching is given whenever needed. With support and empathy, orphans have the potential to complete schooling.

Caregiver and caseworker turn up to the school in times of parents-teachers meet and situation parents need to show up to the school. They play a parental role for orphans. Good manners and etiquette are lacking among the orphans. As they are not brought up from a family, expectation is low, but, along with caregiver from orphanage, there is a hope manners and etiquette are developed among orphans.

Case 4: Inmate

A 13 year old fifth grade inmate despite of health complication, study regularly on time knowing education is the key to achievement, and even motivates fellow inmates to study well. The fear for failure creates test and examination anxiety. Free time was spent for drawing and playing. The leadership quality possessed brings inmates together. Even after several rounds of visit, the attention span is very less and gets frustrated easily.

Problems faced by the case include psychological difficulty due to diverse situation faced, considering everything to be boring and frustrating, poor academic performance due to health issue, and irregularity to school to receive medical check-ups every three months in the state capital. The constant love and concern, visitation after every check-up from the church women's wing results in tenderness creating problem for caregiver and caseworker to deal with this case.

School teachers made many exemptions for the case due to health and psychological difficulty. Even with special consideration and extra support, the case is weak in studies, even weaker after the pandemic. Sometimes school teachers find difficult to deal with the case.

Case 5: Inmate

A 13 year old inmate who did not attend school regularly before being admitted to the orphanage obediently follow study hour even while enjoying to play knowing it is a key to success. The case responded they have a good place for study, good light even when there is no power supply. Study place is free from outside noise, but a group studying together becomes distracting. There is no fear for test and exam; rather loved to face them due to good preparation resulting in a good academic performance.

Dancing and reading Mizo textbook is a hobby, but hates to read English textbook as it is more difficult to understand. If the orphanage provides more story books, the case could have read a variety of books.

Studying, listening to teachers in school, mid-day meal, and playing with friends are the driving force to attend school. Dropping out from school was never thought of. Problem faced in school includes the hesitation to use English as a means of communication and bullying in the previous academic year by being addressed as, '*you orphan, who do not have parents*'. Caregiver and school teacher provided support to be courageous and inspires to study hard to achieve higher than those bully. Currently, the case enjoyed school and feel secure to have a school teacher who never let students bully others.

Case 6: Inmate

A nine year old second grade inmate sometimes hesitate to study when they are in the midst playing and TV time. But once started to study can give full concentration in the study room. Silent reading, followed by written test is the usual way of study. Though well prepared for test and exam, the fear for failure and weakness in English gives stress.

In the orphanage, free time is spent drawing, coloring, and reading stories from Mizo textbook. Resources like sketch pens and papers are always available for use but other resources like maps, flags, and pictures books that could help them in school and foster creativity are lacking and wishes the orphanage have more story books with pictures.

The motivation of caregiver, school building, principal, teachers, playing with friends, and the desire to learn English makes school enjoyable. There is no reason to hate and drop out from school. The only time going to school become difficult was when schoolmates insult as a parentless child. As a result of support from

caregiver and school teacher who never let students bully others the case is confident and comfortable in school. The main challenge faced is the inability to speak in English, making hesitant to approach teachers.

MAJOR FINDINGS

According to Henderson (1996) research-based model to foster resilience in individuals is very important. It was observed that caregiver, caseworker, and teachers are caring and supportive to orphans academic and in building inner strength especially in hard times. The most fundamental factor to withstand unpleasant situation are rendered in the orphanage. Based on observation and interview with orphans, caregiver, caseworker, and school teacher the findings are as follows:

1. Orphans in orphanage have a good study habit. They willingly study on the time scheduled for study without pressure.
2. Orphans have a proper study room with good light and ventilation, free from distraction.
3. They are well prepared for test and exam. They all have a good result in previous exam. Some inmates fear test and exam due to fear of failure.
4. Orphans do not lack school supplies and are managed by the orphanage.
5. Drawing, colouring, dancing, playing, watching television programme, and reading textbook are the activities performed during free time.
6. Issues and challenges includes the limited education of caregiver to help with all subject, poor command of English among inmates, lack of activity books, and the care for inmates admitted at a school going age. Imparting good manners and etiquette is needed among orphans.
7. Ban of mobile phone, strict study routine, motivation, career awareness, and adult supervision are the good practices followed in the orphanage.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Due to the limited education of caregiver, it is recommended that the managing board of the orphanage should introduce a volunteer-led expert tutoring to support English and Mathematics among orphans that could lead to a better outcome in study habit as well as in academic performance of orphans. It is also recommended that the managing board should provide financial aid to encourage caregivers to attain higher education through distance or online mode, and permit to attend any kind of trainings related to their work. Providing with gadgets for self-learning and aiding orphans learning is another recommendation.

Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to a case site study with small sample size resulting in limitations like inability to generalise and limited applicability of the findings with other institutions and population at large.

Dimensions	Caregiver	Case Worker	School Teacher	Inmates
Study Habit	Orphans have a fixed study routine, pressure is not given. Study habit is good.	Orphans have fixed routine for study. No exemption from studies except for health reason. Study habit is good.	Orphans have a good study habit. Indicated by the completion of home-work and project work on time.	Do not get proper education before admitted to the orphanage. But in the orphanage, orphans have a fixed study routine.
Study Place	Spacious and good study place, well lighted and ventilated, free from noise and distraction.	Have a good study room with furniture and proper lighting.	The completion of academic related work is a strong indication orphans have a good study place at the orphanage.	Good place for study, good lighting with power back up, free from outside noise, but group studying in one place becomes distracting.
Resources	Resources available for enhancing creativity and knowledge beyond school are lacking.	Provided with computer and school supplies. Resources for extracurricular activities are lacking.	School supplies, textbooks, and uniform to all.	Adequate resources for school work and utilisation of leisure time. Lack of children's story books for reading.
Preparation	Study hours extended during	Mentoring with homework as soon	Good academic performance	No fear for test and exam; rather

for Exam and Test	exam. Refreshment served as a motivation to study better. There is no stress and fear about exam as they are well prepared.	as they return from school. Caregiver took care of them at night. They are well prepared for exams, so, they are free from stress and tension.	revealing good preparation. Exceptional case of one orphan falling behind others due to health issue.	loved to face it. Only one case fear exam and test due to fear for failure and punishment. All passed in previous exam with a good rank.
Problems and Challenges	Shortage of caregiver mentoring inmate's studies. Special attention, oral, and written test cannot be conducted for all. The education of caregiver is limited; hence service to inmates is limited.	Lack of basic literacy as relatives do not oversee the education before admitted to their system. A case who suffers due to pandemic and surgery affected the mental health resulting in a poor academic performance.	Lack of manners and etiquettes. One orphan who is serious health issue lagging behind others in terms of academic and regularity to school.	Limited resources for free time. Lack of library, encyclopedias, picture dictionary, story books, and educational toys.
Problems faced by Inmates	Bully in school. Fresh inmates do not have basic knowledge they are supposed to have attained.	Some inmates left the orphanage do not receive care and routine for study leading to poor academic performance. They are re-admitted to orphanage with an undesirable lifestyle not entertained for inmates.	Orphans lack of basic knowledge on alphabets and numeracy at the early stage, so, they are admitted to a class lower than their age group.	Bullying in school for being an orphan. Struggling and hesitation to speak English. An exceptional case with major health issue was informed. Monthly routine check-up done at referral hospital leads to often absent from school.
Good Practices	No mobile phone usage. Use only when there is doubt in assignment. Watching TV programs selected by caregiver. Career guidance and motivation given to inmates.	Prohibition of mobile phone. A strict study routine followed with supervision. Career guidance and teaching of manners provided to inmates. Monitored the academic performance of inmates. They had regular health check-up.	Orphans and other students are treated equally. Remedial teaching given whenever needed. Caregiver and caseworker attended parents meeting making orphans feel safe and secure.	Reading text books, drawing, coloring, and babysitting during free time. Helping younger ones in their academic activities.

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