



Extremism in Education in Pakistan: University Teachers' Thoughts

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ABSTRACT. This research study was conducted to explore the teachers' thoughts on extremism in education in Pakistan. The idea of research in this aspect was inspired by the recent acts of terrorism in some leading educational institutions of Pakistan. University teachers were interviewed by the researcher. Questions asked by the researcher were developed from the relevant factors taken from respective literature. The researcher validated these questions with the expert opinion of his supervisor. After validation of questions of interview, data were collected from nine university teachers including three female and six male teachers, belonging to different universities of Pakistan. The sample was purpose drawn from teachers who belonged to different sects, castes, environment and culture, so that a comprehensive opinion come. The interview protocol followed all ethical considerations. The interviews recorded were translated into English with especial focus on the meanings. The collected data were then analyzed according to thematic description approach. The themes were identified and coded and then interpreted into meaningful answers to the research questions. Teachers believed that there were different types and nature of extremism in educational institutions. The major factors identified by the teachers were financial, power politics, deprivation of rights, over-ruling of merit, straying away from the true path of Islam and lack of economic opportunities. Teachers also suggested some recommendations for controlling extremism in universities of Pakistan.

Keywords: Extremism, Education, University Teachers, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Extremism is a major problem faced by Pakistan, especially, after the 9/11 incident. Support of Pakistan in war on terrorism has resulted in life losses and collateral damages as well. Tracking down the timeline, extremism in Pakistan, though apparently associated with the 9/11 attacks, actually has its origin since the very Independence of Pakistan (Khalid, 2014). The period from 1970s to the 1980s was the time when Pakistan supported Islamization both at exterior and at interior levels. Five thousand madrassas (religious schools) were approved and the syllabus of the public schools was rewritten with an emphasis on jihad and Islam. Moreover, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) paid the University of Nebraska, Omaha \$5.1 million from 1984 to 1994 to develop and design a curriculum to encourage jihad and about \$13 million for textbooks based on such a syllabus which were distributed in refugee camps, schools and madrassas both in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Ashraf, 2010). There were only 900 madrassas in Pakistan at the beginning of Zia-ul-Haq's rule, but the number had reached about 8000 registered and 25000 unregistered madrassas at the end (Murphy & Malik, 2009).

As per the views of Mustafa (2010), all the books, pertaining to any subject, contained religious material. The educational policy designed in 1978 also had a deep social impact. The inclusion of religious education was based on Hanafi school of thought that stressed Jihad (Azam, 2014). The report published by the Brooking Institution in 2010 gave a new insight into this phenomenon that the problem was beyond the madrassas. It was argued that public sector education should also be scrutinized and monitored. In the increasing incidents of suicide bombing since 2005, the graduates of madrassas were not involved but the children of 14-18 years of age who were mostly dropouts (Azam, 2014). The roles of madrassas in extremism were studied in depth incorporating its social and political role and it was found that the curriculum of the madrassas was still the same, across Pakistan, as it had been in the past when there was no allegation on madrasa for creating militants (Butt, 2012; Rehman, 2004).

Unscientific scholarship and mass media also played major role in making this illusion (Ali, 2009). Fair (2009), in her survey of 141 families of militants in Pakistan had concluded that from the total only 19 were recruited from madrassas and the same number of recruits from the public sector schools. According to Abbasi (2014) the primary factor, which has directly or indirectly contributed to the promotion of an intolerant and unbalanced society in Pakistan, is the prevailing education system of

Pakistan. The worst result of lack of education or improper education in the case of Pakistan is the spread of extremism and sectarianism in the society, because the state is unable to provide either sufficient opportunities to the youth for education or employment, hence, they are vulnerable to radical tendencies (Abbasi, 2014). At present, there are many streams of education in Pakistan without any common framework. With regard to education policy, it is not only religious institutions which warrant immediate attention but there is a need to evolve a common curricula that inculcate the values of tolerance and social harmony and discourage bigotry (Khan, 2011). Education plays a vital role in developing independent thinking, conscientiousness, awareness and role identity (Extremism in Pakistan, 2010).

The recent extremist activities, happened in Karachi, being associated with highly qualified graduates of a renowned university of Karachi (Dawn, 2015) clearly imply that there is some problem in our educational system that does not neutralize the extreme views of the students. Top ranking business schools of Pakistan according to the university rankings of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, are unable to teach and instill acceptability, tolerance, freedom of expression, and difference of opinion. It is a point to ponder for our education experts. Similar is the incident in Government College University (GCU) when a female student wearing veil was denied admission. The Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) not welcoming Mama Qadeer (a person from a remote area of Pakistan) is another extreme incident. Therefore, this research project was aimed at getting teachers' perspectives on extremism in education in Pakistan. The main question of this research was to explore the perceptions/ thoughts of university teachers regarding extremism in education. Based on the minute review of the related literature on factors contributing to extremism, following sub questions were developed by the researcher: "What are teachers' thoughts on extremism in education?"; "How do teachers perceive about the role of education in promoting extremism in society?"; "What could be the possible factors of this extremism in educational institutions?" and "What are the suggestions of teachers in neutralizing extremism through education in the future?"

This research explored teachers' perspective on extremism and its bases in education system. This study is significant in adding to the body of knowledge about how teachers perceive of extremism and education and their interlinking as well.

Conceptual Model of the Study

Deeply rooted and supported in the literature, the conceptual model of the study was grounded on the direct influence of public education curriculum on extremism. It is explained below in the figure.

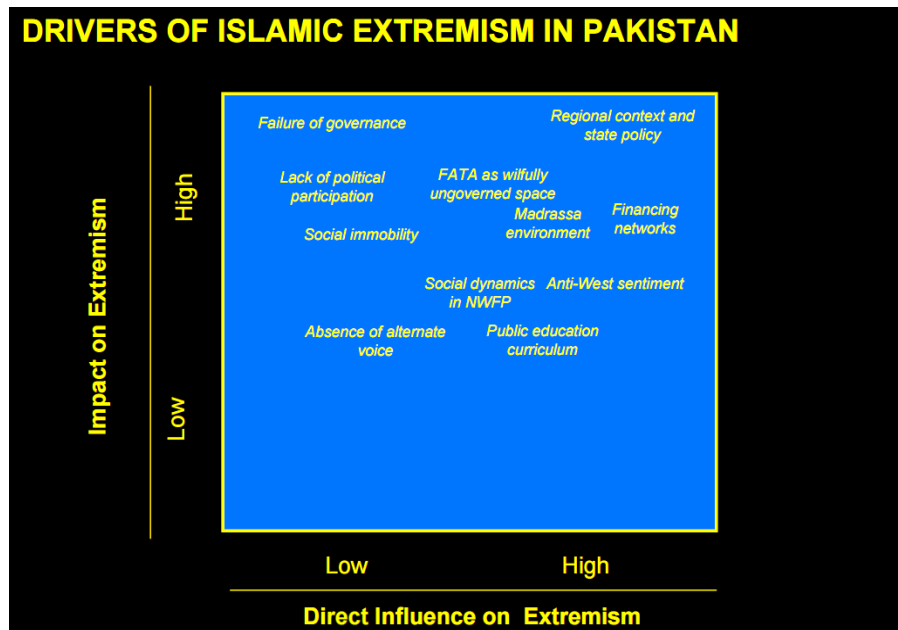


Figure 1. Drivers of Islamic extremism in Pakistan adapted from Jan-Consulting agency analysis, in their work of 2008, “the future of extremism in Pakistan: A twenty year forward look to 2028”

Methodology

This research was conducted through qualitative approach. It was an exploratory study conducted through semi-structured interviews of the teachers. The experts/ educationists who are serving in universities and have vast experience of teaching and administrative posts related to education were selected as the sample of the study. The participants of the study were asked probing questions based on the semi-structured interview. Major themes out of their narratives were identified by the researcher. These themes were coded and then interpreted. The study was conducted in such a way as found teachers’ thoughts and perceptions on extremism, extremism being associated with education, extremism in education, and suggestions on

dissociating extremism from education. The factors of the interview questions were taken from the literature, probing questions were asked by the researcher to get in-depth views of the participants. The interview questions were validated first by taking expert opinion from the advisor and then veteran professors.

Sampling Technique

For this research, purposive sampling technique was used to select nine teachers/ educationists who had been associated with the field of education for the last many years. The purpose of selecting experienced teachers was to get their insight on the phenomenon in order to deeply understand the problem at hand.

Sample

Nine university teachers were selected to participate in this research study. The sample comprised of the male and female university teachers from different universities of Pakistan. Six male and three female teachers were selected to get views of both genders. Teachers belonging to different religious sects, political inclinations, cultures, and segments of society were purposely selected as a sample. These factors were significant in the selection of the sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a semi-structured interview. The interview items were developed from factors selected from the literature and then validated from experts. Main questions and probing questions were asked and the interviews were recorded with prior consent of the participants.

Procedure

The interview questions thus developed were validated by taking the expert opinion of the supervisor and two qualitative research scholars. The framework of the study was shared with them and evidence of construct and content validity were ensured before proceeding with data generation.

The study was conducted in true research spirit. The interviewees were approached by the researcher. Time was taken for the interview. The research questions, interview questions and probing questions were shared

with the participants. Any details about the concept of this research were also given where asked. The researcher visited the teachers at their offices to conduct the interviews. The voice recorder was kept with the researcher. With their permission the whole interview was recorded. Any ambiguity was later clarified to the interviewees to avoid misunderstandings. The interviews were then transcribed completely. The transcriptions were finalized after getting approval from the language expert. The transcriptions were analyzed using Thematic Description Approach of qualitative data analysis.

Ethical Consideration

All ethical considerations were met for this study. Prior permission and time were taken from the interviewees. The data were shared with the participants and confidentiality of the data was ensured by not using it for other than present research activity and by keeping it anonymous.

Results

The interviews conducted by the researcher were transcribed. Mostly, the interviews were in English language, where the language was Urdu (National Language of Pakistan), the researcher translated that in English with special emphasis on the essence of the meanings. The analysis and interpretation of the transcribed data are given below question-wise. The themes were identified for each interview question. Then these themes were coded and interpreted meaningfully. Each participant in this paper was given codes as p. 1 for participant 1, p. 2 for participant 2, and so on. For citing their wordings, the researchers in this paper have used these codes. The main research question was to explore the thoughts of university teachers on extremism in education. To find out the answer to the main research question, four sub questions were generated by the researcher. Each sub question had further probing questions to deeply investigate the phenomenon.

Sub question 1: What are teachers' thoughts on extremism in education?

To answer this question further probing questions were asked from the teachers. "What is extremism to you?" This question was asked by the researcher from the participants to know how they defined extremism. It was seen that most of the interviewees explained extremism in more or less

similar ways and their explanation of extremism was almost the same as the operational definition by the researcher. Generally it was explained as going beyond normal level and not accepting others' thoughts. One interviewee who had vast experience of university teaching and administrative posts explained extremism as "having polar views, both at high and low ends." (p. 3)

Another probing question asked was, "How do you perceive extremism in educational institutions?" This question was posed by the researcher to know how the participants perceived extremism in educational institutions. To answer this question one participant said that 'lack of tolerance' was seen in educational institutions. Four participants said that there was 'cultural', 'religious' and 'ethnic' extremism in educational institutions. One interviewee narrated that "Extremism is regional and it varies from context to context. The four provinces of Pakistan are dynamically different from one another. The motives of extremism in one province are different from the motives of extremism in the other province." (p. 4). One female participant did not perceive extremism in educational institutions. In her words: "People perceive that extremism is involved in educational institutions without having practical experience of those institutions. I don't think that there is extremism as such in educational institutions, it is just practicing one's own thoughts" (p.7), she added upon asking her own practical experience.

Sub question 2: How do teachers perceive about the role of education in promoting extremism in society?

To answer this question, teachers were asked probing questions. The researcher observed that the detailed answers were not given by the teachers so the researcher enquired in depth by further probing through leading questions e.g. "Do you think that extremism is getting involved in educational institutions? If yes, how?" The analysis of the probing questions is as follows.

All the participants agreed that extremism was getting involved in the educational institutions. Adding to it, one participant told, "teachers are getting extremists in their views, they lack patience." (p. 5). Other participant was of the view that "educational institutions are being used for extremism by some forces as per their motives." Another participant who also believed so, continued that "The components of education are broad, it involves so many bases. So extremism is multi-faceted in education. It may

be social extremism, religious extremism, and cultural extremism. Sectarianism is present in the society, it has come into the university sector as well. If we take examples, we see that in University of Engineering and Technology (UET) 'Jammat-ud-Dawa' (a rightist religious group) is dominant, and in University of the Punjab (PU) another group 'Jammat-e-Islami' is dominant." (p. 4).

Another participant raised a point of societal division and asserted the role of private education in the following words: "Extremism is getting involved in educational institutions because there are different streams of education. Private education is dependent on the social status of the parents. We are not producing a harmonious society. We are producing individuals. In this way every person believes what he is thinking is right and that others are wrong. This bifurcation is causing extremism." (p. 9). Another probing question asked by the researcher was, "Is it our education system that promotes extremism?" Seven participants responded that our education system was not responsible for the promotion of extremism. A participant narrated "No, education system is not, media is a key factor, and society itself is the reason. Education always plays its role in reducing extremism." (p. 3).

One participant said that the system was only responsible to the extent that it did not check the loopholes that let extremism come into the educational institutions. Only one participant was of the view that education system was responsible for promoting extremism. Here the need was felt to further ask a question, "What are your views on comparing extremism in public and private sector institutions?" Upon comparing the public and private sector institutions, four participants said that public sector institutions were more prone to generating extremism. Lack of freedom was the reason given by them for rating public sector institutions high. Three interviewees believed that private sector institutions were more extremists because of the agenda of the people behind those institutions. Two of the participants narrated that both public and private sector institutions had extremism issues. One interviewee explained in the following words: "In government sector, universities are labelled by the people who dominate those universities. For instance, Quaid-i-Azam University, LUMS, PU, Peshawer University etc. while in private sector it is obvious that the philosophy of those who founded the universities would be prevalent. In Aligarh University, you will find Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in Minhaj University you will find Tahir ul Qadri. So there is extremism in these universities in a way that you cannot speak against the philosophy of the founders." (p. 1).

On investigating the thoughts of teachers on comparing boys and girls on extreme views, a probing question was asked. "Are girls having more extreme views or boys? Why?" Four participants said that boys were more extreme in their views and they could be expressive in showing their extremism physically because they had more exposure of the outer world and because of their masculinity. Four participants believed that people of both the genders were extreme, it depended upon the situation. One participant informed that "Any gender can be extremist. Sometimes, girls get more extremist, other times boys get extremist. It depends upon the opportunities one gets." (p. 4). One female participant said that girls were more extremist as per her observations as a teacher. Girls were stronger and more rigid in their views.

Sub question 3: What could be the possible factors of this extremism in educational institutions?

When interviewees were asked to identify different factors of this extremism in educational institutions, four teachers reckoned financial factor as the most pertinent reason of this extremism. One participant remarked "the incident of Lal Masjid (a madrassa in the federal capital of Pakistan) is eminent in understanding this extremism phenomena. They were financed by some other party and that was why they stood against the government." (p. 8).

The other main reason identified by the participants was straying away from the true path of Islam. Two participants reckoned that ignorance of the true Islamic principles resulted in extremism. Another major reason found of this extremism in educational institutions was lack of merit. The snatching of rights and over rule of merit was a reason of extremism, to two of the participants. And then there was power and politics as the key reason behind this extremism. Substantiating that with argument a teacher elaborated that "there is vast agricultural land in University of the Punjab, so people want to occupy this university for political and power benefits. Another example is of book fair. The rent of each stall is taken from them. So it is an economic benefit which attracts people to get in power which leads to extremism." (p. 2).

Other factors highlighted by one participant were social division, religious bias and sectarian differences.

A probing question here was asked from the interviewees. "Do you consider that our curriculum is a key contributor to the extremism? Explain the reasons, if any?" Seven participants reckoned that curriculum was not a

contributor to extremism. According to them the people behind the curriculum and the people at the implementation of that curriculum were more important in this regard. A participant giving an argument in this favor stated that “if curriculum is the reason in promoting extremism then I have gone through the same curriculum in my school/ college years. But why I am not inclined toward extremism.” (p. 2). Two participants believed that curriculum contributed toward extremism. They emphasized that certain schools of thought that could be religious, philosophical or social, represented extremism through their curricula.

Another probing question based on the literature was asked by the researcher. “Do you see any role of foreign aid in promoting extremism? If yes, what role?” Six interviewees gave their opinion in affirmative that foreign aid was promoting extremism. They said that no aid was without any agenda. Commenting on the foreign aid’s role in promoting extremism, one of the interviewees shared his experience in the following words: “The only thing they are interested in Pakistan is our curriculum. They want such a curriculum that support their philosophy or at least minimize the hard feelings against them.” (p. 5). Two participants said that foreign aid was not directly involved; instead those who were using this foreign aid were using it for their own agenda.

One interviewee negated the notion of any role of foreign aid in promoting extremism by saying, “Foreign aid is not involved in promoting extremism, but they are giving aid in their own agenda, we should take the aid for our own use, for example, we should get aid in power sector to run the industry to create economic opportunities. Poverty raises extremism.” (p. 3).

A leading subsidiary question was posed by the researcher. “Do you think whether our new generation is more prone to extremism or not? If yes, why?” There were diversified opinions on this question. One participant said, “No new generation is not prone to. It is the stigma that is associated with us that we are producing extremists.” (p. 9). Another participant was of the view that “New generation is involved in it because of the lack of economic opportunities. Population growth and less employability is causing new generation to get inclined toward extremism.” (p. 8).

Sub question 4: What are the suggestions of teachers in neutralizing extremism through education in the future?

When enquired about how extremism could be controlled in educational institutions they rated the following factors in priority: Economic growth,

employment opportunities, education and awareness, changes in curriculum by adding Islamic teachings of tolerance, patience and acceptance of others, and training of the teachers, rewarding professionalism, and by following standards.

A probing question was asked to clarify the role of government in this phenomenon. "Is there any role of government policies or change in government in intriguing extreme views?"

All participants responded in the affirmative. A participant told, "As for governments they have failed to develop and implement neutral policies that could satisfy all factions of the society." (p. 7). Another interviewee shared similar views "Government's role cannot be over ruled especially by creating political extremism and also, sometimes, religious extremism". (p. 6). Seven participants said that government could play a pivotal role in neutralizing the extreme views in education through continuation of their policies, economic prosperity and quality education.

DISCUSSION

The main research question was to explore the thoughts of the university teachers about extremism in education. Four sub questions were developed from the main question. The teachers' thoughts were analyzed and answers to these questions were given to meet the objectives of the study. The teachers were asked to explain the term extremism and their explanation was closely related to the definition of the researcher to conduct this study. Extremism in educational institutions was thought as lacking tolerance and patience having religious, cultural and ethnic extremism. These results were consistent with the report published (Extremism in Pakistan, 2010). The report also found cultural and religious extremism in Pakistani context. Hence this research question was answered that extremism was prevailing in educational institutions but the means of this extremism might vary from culture to culture, region to region.

The role of education in extremism was found to the extent that it created social division in the society on the basis of different streams of education in our system. The universities were promoting certain 'sectarian extremism', 'power politics extremism', and 'private bodies' philosophy extremism'. Abbasi (2014) also found that extremism to gain power was seen in educational institutions. The educational system was not found at fault by majority of the participants of present study. It means that education system of Pakistan is at the right track. Now after the 18th amendment of the

constitution of Pakistan 1973, education is devolved to the provinces and now provinces have to make their own education systems. Huge responsibility lies on the shoulders of the provincial policy makers to keep the society united through education and to control the private educational bodies as well. The government is playing a key role in registering all the NGOs schools, madrassa schools, and a governing body is formalized to regulate the fee structure of the private institutions (The Express Tribune, 2015).

Probing questions based on the factors identified in the literature were asked by the interviewees. The factors were identified by the teachers as financial factors, over rule of merit, deprivation of rights, social division, power and politics, straying away from the true path of the religion. The financial factors were quoted in almost every literature on extremism. The social division, lack of tolerance, and deprivation of rights factors were consistent with views of Ali (2009) and Abbasi (2014). Education streams and role of public and private institutes was also quoted by Fair (2009) which were consistent with this research findings that public institutions generated extremism in own ways and private sector institutions generated extremism in different ways. In this study the curriculum was not found as any significant contributor to promoting extremism. Therefore, the findings of Ashraf (2010); Murphy and Malik (2009) are contradictory to this research's findings. The argument built by the teachers in this study was pertinent in portraying the neutral role of curriculum in extremism that if curriculum had been the inciting factor in extremism, they themselves had gone through the same curriculum and why they had not been such extremists.

The teachers reported in this study that neither the system nor the curricula were responsible, rather how people in charge manipulated them in their own agenda, is what matters the most. So a need of training of teachers in professionalism arose here. It was interesting to note that in this research there was no significant difference in the thoughts and perceptions of university teachers based on their gender.

Various suggestions were given by the teachers in neutralizing extremism through education. The curriculum was emphasized to play a long term role in neutralizing this menace of extremism through including true Islamic teachings about tolerance and patience. The sermons of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) can be added in the curriculum to spread awareness about controls over unlimited desires; brotherhood; and unity. These findings were

contradictory to the views of Awan (2012) and Riaz (2010) who believed that through Islamization, the foundation of extremism was laid. The participants of the present study gave a very clear opinion about Islam, that the true values and teachings of Islam did not support any extremism. It is the people who implement those curricula, who are responsible for twisting them for their own agenda. Thus the role of curriculum should be to neutralize any such act and teachings of those manipulators. The discussion of Butt (2012) explained that western media portrays the role of Islam in militancy and terrorism, which is totally falsified.

Continuation of governmental policies was also suggested to be important for economic opportunities, prosperity and growth. Rule of merit, equal opportunities and protection of one's rights were also thought to be the possible factors in controlling the phenomenon of extremism. Jan consultancy (2008) also viewed financial factors as important in extremism.

Hence in this way, all the sub questions were answered. The main research question of exploring teachers' thoughts on extremism in education in Pakistan was answered.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions in the light of discussion are as follows. The study was aimed at seeking the university teachers' thoughts about extremism in education. The study concluded that role of education was to minimize extremism in society. Teachers agreed that in their present state the educational institutions were involved in extremism. Different types of extremism were found according to the participants. Religious extremism, social division through diversified education streams, sectarianism through different educational institutions, lack of tolerance for rigidity in one's views, over rule of merit, and deprivation of rights through unfair means were the various types of extremism as perceived by the teachers. Public and private sector institutions were perceived differently regarding extremism.

Girls and boys were viewed equally rigid and extreme in their views but boys were reported to be more expressive because of their masculinity and outer exposure. Financial factors, power factors, and straying away from the true spirit of Islam were found as significant factors in elevating extremism. Curriculum engineers, teachers and persons with specific agenda were blamed for misusing the curriculum and tilting it toward their own interests. Foreign aid with agenda behind it was also a key contributor to extremism. As far as controlling this menace is concerned, the teachers gave suggestions

of bringing economic prosperity in the country through continued governance, ensuring equal opportunities and protection of the rights of all. Islamic teachings were also considered to be important in eliminating extremism from educational institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research study, the following recommendations were given:

1. Training of teachers is recommended for their sense of professionalism in educational institutions to avoid inciting any kind of extreme views or fundamental approach in the students.
2. The educational system needs to be vigilant in identifying people who maneuver things, especially curricula, for their own purpose.
3. The foreign aid is recommended to be used according to the need assessment of ground realities of the educational system of Pakistan.
4. Students should be given choice/ freedom to accept or reject any view of the teacher, which is based on his/ her personal opinion only.
5. Curriculum changes are also recommended. Islamic teachings should be incorporated in the curriculum so as to promote tolerance, patience and brotherhood in the society through educational institutions.

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