

Beliefs of Prospective Teachers to Eliminate Social Problems of Pakistani Society

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Abstract

The paper contributes in exploring the beliefs of prospective teachers regarding nature, causes and solution of prevailing social problems of Pakistani society. Qualitative research method was used administering open ended questionnaire to 387 post graduate teacher education learners enrolled in Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan. Respondents were asked to write paragraphs about reasons and solution of different social problems including corruption, unemployment, gender discrimination, domestic and sectarian violence, women harassment, injustice and intolerance. Content analysis of the manuscripts reveals that future teachers are well aware of the existing social problems of the country and have suggestions to eliminate these problems. The student teachers propose expansion in the access of education; legislation and its strict implications to reduce different social crimes; social justice as well as thoughtful understanding of Islamic preaching to eliminate most of the current social problems from Pakistani society.

Keywords: Teacher education, Sectarian violence, Honor killing, Gender discrimination, Legislation

Introduction

Social dimensions of education highly contribute in nurturing social cohesion, citizenship association and people's personal wellbeing. Dilemma of social exclusion and disruption is worsened in educationally deprived and disadvantaged societies. War, hunger, disease, and other similar problems have multiplied the severeness of social and societal conflicts in many underdeveloped countries (Lindbeck, 2002). Pakistan with the population of more than 180 million people spends its huge budget on military expenditures and strengthening its atomic arsenal but at the same time faces frightful poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, energy crises and bulk of other social and economic problems. Social efficiency theorists, reformists, and social meliorists are convinced to use education and enhanced awareness as instruments to alleviate multiple social disadvantages to create positive change in the society (Schiro, 2012).

Schiro (2012) is among the sociologists who suggest advance awareness and education as major sources to alleviating multiple social disadvantages. However, provision of universal and quality education itself is emerged as a giant problem in many southern countries including Pakistan (Unesco, 2014). Governments in these countries are facing numerous challenges in providing universal formal schooling of all levels. Non-formal and distance education in this scenario is emerged as effective supplement of formal systems of education. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad is a major institution of open learning in Pakistan offering programs of all educational levels for the persons of all age groups. The university is successfully attempting for academic and cognitive learning of the students. Research demonstrates that the teacher education programs of AIOU focus on generating critical and reflective thinking skills among the students (Buzdar & Ali, 2013). Epstein (2003) postulates that identification and acquisition of related information is prerequisite for rational and effective decision making. The current study

investigated the awareness of student teachers studying in AIOU about the nature, causes and solutions of social dilemmas of Pakistani society. Information of this type deems necessary for teaching social decision making.

We developed the foundations of this research on the principles of social constructivism as well as social constructionism. The social constructionists urge to examine social processes that produce problematic phenomena in the society so that prospective remedies can be devised, implemented and evaluated (Weinberg, 2009). The social constructivism on the other hand inquires people's social learning that is the result of their interaction with fellows and society. In this research we examined the social processes of education in developing comprehension and evaluation of problematic aspects of Pakistani society. We also focused to explore the prospective teachers' learning that conceives the solutions of prevailing social dilemmas of the society in their minds.

Research Objectives

Education is a reliable source of social change. Quality education interacts with young generation and support them in maintaining social order and boosting social development (Burns, 2002). Teachers' perceptions of society and social norms contribute in establishing learners' beliefs that motivate them to take practical steps for building a prosperous society. The current study, focusing on this distinguished role of the teachers, investigated mental and intellectual state of the prospective teacher about presence, roots and solutions of social problems prevailing in Pakistani society. Major aim of the current study was to analyze the perspectives of future teachers about the presence and severeness of different social problems in Pakistani society. The study also investigated intellectual understandings of the prospective teachers about the genuineness of their perceived causes. A supplementary objective of the current study was to propose measures that could reduce the severeness of prevailing social problems making the society more prosperous,

secure and peaceful. It was attempted that a deep comprehension of future teachers' views regarding nature, causes and solutions of the prevailing social problems could be sought.

Significance of the Research

Distance education, in underdeveloped countries, has expanded its access to the students of remote and marginalized areas as well as people of urban middle class (Creed & Perraton, 2001). People living in such areas comprise more than half of the total population in Pakistan. This study is of great significance that it examines awareness and intellectual approaches of future teachers who are getting their training through distance learning programs for removing social problems of Pakistani society. It examines the role of distance education in disseminating social awareness and generating intellectual maturity in this regard. The study contributes in getting profound understanding of student teachers' perspectives to eliminating social hurdles and alleviating conflicts, war, disease, illiteracy and terrorism from Pakistan. Findings of the study provide reflections that are vital in implementing progressive teacher education models as well as curricular activities with the aim of social development in Pakistan.

Methodology

Bernard (2000) and Creswell (2003) comparing different research methodologies suggest that qualitative methods of inquiry are relatively more suitable for studies where research objectives demand deep comprehension of any issue/phenomenon rather than statistical interpretations. Since the current study was to get understanding of future teachers' beliefs regarding elimination of social problems of Pakistani society; it seemed quite appropriate to follow qualitative research approach (Bernard, 2000, 2011). One open ended questionnaire was developed to gather the required data in qualitative form and administered to prospective teachers. The review of related literature helped us in preparing a list of prevailing social problems in the South including

corruption, illiteracy, gender discrimination, intolerance, domestic violence, unemployment, sectarian violence, honor killing and social inequalities. The respondents were requested to write brief paragraphs separately on each social issue/problem explaining its roots and providing solutions.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is a prominent institution of distance learning in Pakistan. The researcher visited three campuses of AIOU located in Southern Punjab and gathered the information of students enrolled in Master level teacher education programs. The 140 student teachers from each campus were randomly selected to collect the required data that raised the sample size to 420 prospective teachers. However, only 387 future teachers participated in the study returning duly completed questionnaires. Mean age of the respondents was 29.30 ranging from 21 to 55 years. The 74.4% respondents were females whereas 42.0% of total respondents were from rural backgrounds. The 72.8% of total respondents were in public or private job. The 73.6% of respondents were studying in their second semester whereas 10.1% and 16.3% respondents were in their third and fourth semesters respectively. The sample was selected from Master level classes however 67.5% of them already had Master's degrees in any other discipline. Data analysis is the essence of entire research. In the current study, relational analysis technique that is the type of content analysis approach was used in this regard. Richards (2005) suggests relational analysis for qualitative inquiry to focus on both explicit and implicit concepts available in the data. Different themes were derived from the data and analyzed exploring their roots and relationships with each other. Findings were verified looking at all previous stages of data collection and analysis. Conclusions were drawn to explain future teachers' beliefs about the existence of different social problems in Pakistani society and their perceived solutions.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability in qualitative studies are generally regarded as trustworthiness of collection and analysis of the data (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Richards (2005) and Silverman (2006) highlight the need of different evidences to maintain validity and reliability in qualitative inquiries. In the current study, different steps were taken in this regard. First, formal consent was sought from all participants prior to administering the questionnaires. Confidentiality was assured to all the participants. The prospective teachers were ensured that acquired data would be used only for research purpose and dealt as confidential. To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, it was maintained that the data were appropriate and appropriately handled. Following Richards (2005), two rules were accepted to meet this requirement. First, a specific way of checking was designed, which consistently tested how the data and handling of the data were supportive to meet the research objectives. Secondly, researchers' abilities were ensured to account each step of the research properly consulting researchers and experts of the field.

Delimitations of the Study

The current study is based on the opinions of distance learners of AIOU teacher education programs only. The findings and emerged themes have relevancy with the perspectives of the AIOU distance learners that were enrolled in post-graduate teacher education courses and attended workshops in the three campuses of AIOU. Generalization of research conclusions to the students of other institutions, programs or campuses requires careful manipulation of factors that differentiate these groups from the sample.

Findings

Major requirement of the current study was to understand prospective teachers' thinking and beliefs about the nature and genuineness of social problems in Pakistani society and their perceived solution. The emerging themes explain the future teachers' perspectives regarding severeness of

major social issues, their roots and strategies to eliminate these problems. The frequencies of the sub-themes under the main themes are as under:

Table 1

Frequencies of the Sub-Themes under the Main Themes (N=387)

Theme	Sub-Theme	<i>f</i>	% of N
Awareness of the Social Problems	Social Related Issues	112	29
	Gender Related Issues	152	39
	Religious Extremism	73	19
Roots of the Social Problems	Illiteracy: The mother of all evils	256	66
	Bad Impacts of Media	65	17
	Attitude against Women	123	32
	Financial Deprivation	198	51
	Lack of Religious Awareness	89	23
Solutions of the Social Problems	Education for All	178	46
	Gender-Sensitive Education	87	23
	Islamic Education	272	70
	Elimination of Corruption	189	49
	Legislation and Law Enforcement	64	17

The findings of the study are categorized and presented under following themes and sub-themes.

Awareness of the Social Problems

Findings reveal that prospective teachers were well aware of the social problems of Pakistani society. These problems are categorized in the following themes.

Social related Issues

Corruption is emerged as a big social problem in views of male student teachers whereas female prospective teachers opine that un-employment is a big social problem for them. The respondents provide their comments on the issues of intolerance, sectarianism, however, in their point of view; these issues are secondary in nature. The respondents (both male and female) show concerns about illiteracy and ignorance in the society. Majority of these problems, according to respondents, occurs as the result of ignorance and illiteracy. A student teacher, female 26, of Master of Education

program who told her married and un-employed remarked “*illiteracy is the only big reason of all our social problems that are listed here. If ignorance exists than all these problems will exist.*” One of her colleagues, female 27, who told her unmarried, commented “*illiteracy is major hurdle against national development of Pakistan. Only educated nation can become a developed and prosperous one.*” Another respondent, male 32, who told him employed in public sector explained that a bad trend in our system was the education for the sake of degree. He urges that students should focus on getting comprehension and awareness rather than mere degree.

Gender related Issues

Prospective teachers also demonstrated well awareness of various gender related social issues gender discrimination, domestic violence, honor killing and sexual harassment. A student teacher, female 28, enrolled in M.Ed., who told her employed in private sector, showed great concerns about gender discrimination in society. She wrote “*gender discrimination within home and outside the home is a tact widely used by men to push back the women in their lives.*” She further added “*when a woman comes out of home she faces different problems like harassment, bullying, discrimination, violence etc. Resultantly she loses courage and prefers to stay home*”. Her fellow, male 34, employed in public sector, was more elaborative in this regard. He quoted the example of developed countries where males and females worked together for nation building. He proposed equal opportunities and secure environment for females in every field of life. He also highlighted that discrimination and harassment compelled many people to stop their girls’ education and jobs in many cases.

Religious Extremism

The prospective teachers also criticized the role of religious extremists in increasing social conflicts and segregation. Majority of the respondents agreed that the role of religious leaders were

not ideal. Pursuing of personal and group interests is the key reason of sectarian and religious violence in the country. A male respondent of 50 years age, employed in public sector, provided elaborative comments in this regard. He argued that “*many so called religious scholars have little knowledge of Islam and Islamic religiosity. They generally work to serve the interests of their sects and groups. Such people and their acts damage unity and piece in the society*”. It is found that majority student teachers are unsatisfied with the role of religious scholars and mark such people as a major cause of religious and sectarian violence in the society.

Comments of prospective teachers reveal that they have reasonable awareness of social problems. They also have understanding that these problems are hampering social and financial progress of the Pakistani society.

Roots of the Social Problems

The prospective teachers highlighted different roots of prevailing social problems. We categorized their opinions in following themes.

Illiteracy: The mother of all evils

Opinions of the student teachers were varied regarding causes of social problems in Pakistani society. Large numbers of prospective teachers agreed that illiteracy was the mother of all social problems. The significant numbers of student teachers highlighted other social, financial and religious factors that generated and increased conflicts in the society. Illiteracy, ignorance and unawareness, according to majority of the respondents, are key reasons of social crimes against women.

Bad Impact of Media

Media in Pakistan is in developing phase. It demonstrates immature and irresponsible conduct in many cases. The prospective teachers show concerns on the bad effects of media on Pakistani

youth. A female respondent, 33, married and public servant, argued that media generated frustration among the people that is usually outraged in the shape of violence and harassment against women. A male students teacher, 29, unemployed, described “*role of media in our country is confused. It worked very well on many occasions but similarly sometimes it is simply negligent. People in media are not well trained. They project biasness and detestation in many cases. They have their vested interests that undermine their impartiality and fairness*”. The prospective teachers opine that many social evils are badly boosted by the different programs of television channels.

Attitude against Women

It was worrisome that some male respondents blamed women that their “un-Islamic” attitude caused violence and harassment against them. Existence of such type of attitude, though in short numbers of people, may reveals tough and unhealthy social environment for females in many areas of the country. The male prospective teachers also highlighted nepotism, corruption, and favoritism as significant causes of un-employment. Female future teachers in contrast described that gender discrimination, male domination and out-of-home unfriendly environment had decreased employment opportunities for them. An un-employed student of Master of Arts in Education, female 26, expressed “*females are not given equal freedom of education and job. They are detained in veils. Males use religion to put unfair pressures on females and retain males’ dominance on them*”.

Financial Deprivation

Significant numbers of prospective teachers explain that poverty is among the major reasons of different social dilemmas in Pakistan. People from marginalized social groups cannot afford health and education facilities. It pushes large number of people in ignorance and illiteracy. Some student

teachers link poverty with corruption. Poverty, in the views of reasonable respondents is core reason of various crimes like robbery, theft, bribery etc. A female future teacher of 36, married and employed in private sector, expressed *“poverty generate frustration among the people; resultantly they behave in-tolerantly. They fall in crimes. They deceive one another”*. A reasonable amount of the students of teacher education programs call poverty the root of sectarian and religious violence. *“Poor and frustrated youth is more vulnerable for sectarian and other violent groups”* an unemployed student, male 42, quoted. His fellow, male 33, employed in public sector as secondary school teacher opines *“poverty creates mental disturbance. Generally people move to religious personalities to gain mental and spiritual satisfaction. Now they are on the behalf of those personalities. In many cases religious groups decide how, when and where they may use these poor for their social and political benefits”*.

Lack of Religious Awareness

Several students support religious education and postulate that lack of religious awareness is a core reason of different social problems. For instance corruption, social in-justice, violence against women, honor killing, and domestic violence are getting roots in the society due to people’s unawareness of Islamic religious principles. A distance learner of M.Ed. female 29, unmarried and employed in private sector, argues *“Islam grants rights to women. Islam grants rights to mothers, sisters, and wives but people are unaware of their rights and responsibilities. Such types of unawareness and ignorance are significant factors that breed large numbers of social conflicts and complexities among the people”*. The student teachers postulate that due to unawareness of Islamic commands and obligations people are indulged in different social evils and crimes.

Solutions of the Problems

Findings disclose that prospective teachers have rich and mature understanding of the solutions of prevailing social problems. Major suggestions conceived by the student teachers are categorized in following themes.

Education for All

Majority respondents show concerns about illiteracy and deteriorate conditions of basic education institutions in the country and urge to refine and upgrade educational facilities across the country. Education, in their point of view, provides consciousness and awareness to the people. It works as major catalyst and change agent in the society. A female student teacher of 23 years age, unmarried and un-employed, stresses *“if we want change; if we want progress then we must expand our education. Every child must have access to education”*. The respondents also emphasized the provision of free and compulsory education for all.

Gender-Sensitive Education

Women related social issues are also linked with lack of education in the country. The future teachers stress on the need of equal educational opportunities for both males and females in the country. A male respondent, 38, writes *“people should be taught that their women have rights; their women have equal rights; their women have equal respect and dignity”*. A female respondent, married 28 elaborates *“people should be given awareness and education of their rights, and their fellows’ rights*. The student teachers proposed gender-sensitive education that aware the students with their rights and responsibilities and encourage them to follow their social duties.

Islamic Education

Prospective teachers hypothesize that Islamic education can prevent the people from various social conflicts however the students reject biased and sectarian religious education. A female respondent, married 28, describes *“people should be given Islamic education which can prevent them from*

corruption and violence". The student teachers consider Islamic education a major source of success in the lives and afterlives of people. Education, in their point view, must indoctrinate people with just beliefs of Islam. A male student, 27, of M.Ed. wrote *"Islamic education strengthens people's beliefs in God. This belief guides these people in every sphere of their lives. Belief in God helps people in the time of trouble"*. Islamic education is an effective mean of imparting just and humanity based education to students.

Elimination of Corruption

Another step suggested by the student teachers is the elimination of corruption from the society. The respondents opine that corruption has ruined the society in every field. Corruption is mother of all evils of the society. Students propose clear and elucidated legislation and its strict implementation to eliminate corruption form the public institutions. A future teacher, female 33, writes *"there are many loopholes in the legislation that provide opportunities of escape to many corrupt people"*. A male prospective teacher 23, unemployed and unmarried, suggest *"Government should improve implementation methods of legislation. Due to lack of strict implementation of anti-corruption laws; people freely use unfair means to get undue benefits"*. According to majority of prospective teachers, defined legislation and its strict implementation can reduce corruption in the society that will decrease several related social problems. For instance, many future teachers consider that corruption is among the reasons of unemployment, injustice and intolerance. A male learner of M.Ed. 34, employed in public sector, states *"decisions on merit and justice can demolish several problems of our society"*.

Legislation and Law Enforcement

Future teachers also propose legislation as well as its firm implementation to eliminate women related problems of society. Women feel insecure in the society. They are victims of domestic

violence, honor killing, harassment and discrimination at different levels. Majority student teachers are dissatisfied with existing legislative provisions and demand more strict laws in this regard. A female learner of M.A. Education 24, employed in public sector, opines “*in a male dominant society like Pakistan, it is very difficult to ensure equal rights for women through prevailing legal provisions. We demand more strict laws and their implementation*”. Male future teachers are also on the same page with their female fellows. A male student 42, employed in public sector as secondary school teacher, writes “*state should make legislation for women’s rights especially to preserve their fundamental rights*”. The respondents also have concerns about laws against domestic violence. They propose twofold strategy i.e. legislation and education to overcome this issue. A student teacher, male 31, married and employed in private sector, accept that legislation is vital to stop domestic violence against women but, in his point of view, in many cases of domestic violence education and awareness of women rights may be more fruitful than mere legislative provisions. In many areas of the country, social and domestic pressures do not allow women to register case of domestic violence against their male family members. A female learner 29, married and employed in private sector, propose that in such areas education may be more effective than mere legislation. She urges to aware the people (both male and female) about their duties as well as rights.

Discussion

Findings demonstrate that the future teachers have solid concerns about the social problems of Pakistani society. The opinions of prospective teachers studying in AIOU Islamabad support the reports of Unesco (2012, 2014) that reveals a lot of problems in Pakistani society hindering development and social change. Though prospective teachers show their concerns about the prevalence of religious extremism however they are prolific in indicating general social and gender

related issues. Illiteracy, corruption, poverty are among major social related issues hampering Pakistani society. Among gender related issues, the future teachers highlight gender disparity, domestic violence, harassment, bullying as major prevailing problems in Pakistan. Literature demonstrates that these social and gender related issues exist in financially developing societies as well as in Pakistan (P. A. Ali & Gavino, 2008; T. S. Ali, et al., 2011; Schiro, 2012; Unesco, 2014). The current study, however, is important that it investigate to what extent Pakistani future teachers are aware of the intensity of these problems. It is encouraging that the student teachers are not only aware of these issues but have a clear program of removing these social obstacles.

Exploring the roots of Pakistani social problems the future teachers disclose that in their point of view illiteracy is the mother of all evils. Bad impacts of media, attitude against women, financial deprivation and lack of religious awareness are emerged other significant causes of swallowed social problems of Pakistani society. The causes revealed by the prospective teachers are realistic and knowledge based. The solutions presented by the prospective teachers reveal their maturity and richness of experience. The student teachers suggest education for all and gender sensitive and Islamic education for removing these social dilemmas. Buzdar and Ali (2011) provided similar suggestions to refine parents' attitude towards their daughters' education in tribal areas of Pakistan. The future teachers' opinions in this regards seem practical and rational. The future teachers also propose elimination of corruption and proper legislation as well as its implementation as a mean to eliminate major social problems of society. It is important that such types of recommendations are also found in previous research (Buzdar, Ali, & Nadeem, 2011; Schiro, 2012; Unesco, 2014). This study however is important that it focuses on future teachers and is based on their reflections. The student teachers' beliefs about the existence of social problems in Pakistani society, their roots and proposed solutions raise a hope of betterment for Pakistan.

Conclusions

Process of change demands highly emotive as well as rational grounds. Badley (1986) theorizes that the first phase of this process is logical and profound analysis of the situation. Major aim of the current study was to evaluate the mental preparedness of prospective teachers to perform as change agent in Pakistani society. Belliefs of prospective teachers regarding nature, reasons and solutions of existing social complexities were deeply explored to meet the research objectives. It is concluded that future teachers possess appropriate abilities of analyzing social issues and conflicts of Pakistani society. They mark illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, corruption, religious/sectarian violence, and unemployment as major social and societal difficulties of the country. Similarly the student teachers do not undermine the bitterness of women related issues like gender discrimination, domestic violence, honor killing, and harassment. The future teachers disclose different significant reasons of these problems including lack of education, corruption, misinterpretation of Islamic commands and absence of appropriate legislation and its implementation. The future teachers propose that provision of education and awareness along with strict legislation and its implantation can contribute in alleviating these social problems from the society.

Literature manifests social conflicts and problems in Pakistani society. Major contribution of the current study is providing conceptual orientation of future teachers to overcome these complexities. The student teachers showed mature intellectual comprehension of the problems and optimistic remedy plans. Suggestions provided by the prospective teachers are feasible, workable and timely. The study shows that the prospective teachers are clear in their minds about social configuration of Pakistani society and factors that are hampering the structure and wellbeing of the society. It is also evident that the expansion in the access to higher education can play role in

increasing awareness of social problems and consequently their elimination from the society. There is a need to provide professional expertise and improve existing educational infrastructure so that prospective teachers may implement their reformation models effectively after joining their duties.

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