

Role of Teacher Education in Preparing Teachers for Teaching in Religious Schools of Balochistan

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Abstract

A large number of children in Balochistan attend religious schools (Madrasas) that have been criticized for spreading extremist views in the society. Teacher education institutions play a vital role in bringing cultural and religious harmony by producing prospective teachers who are able to cultivate tolerance, acceptance, patriotism, ethnic, religious respect and counter extremism, sectarian, and discrimination prospective. This qualitative exploratory study explores whether the prospective teachers in Balochistan are trained enough to teach in religious schools. The data were collected through in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. All teacher educators and prospective teachers from the universities that remained part of Pre-STEP or Teacher Education Project (TEP) assisted by USAID constituted the population of the study. Sample was selected through purposive sampling from two universities situated in Quetta. 10 teacher educators (5+5) and 10 prospective teachers (5+5) were selected as sample for interviews while two groups of prospective teachers (5 participants in each) were selected from the both case universities for focus group interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the prospective teachers and teacher educators considered the recent teacher education programs in Balochistan not enough to train teachers to teach in religious schools.

Keywords: *Prospective Teachers; Religious Schools; Teacher Education Programs; Balochistan*

1. Introduction

The role of a teacher education institution is to train teachers for teaching in schools in a country. In Pakistan, currently a divergent education system exists where different types of schools are running as public, ordinary private, elite private and religious or traditional schools. These all schools have different curricula, teaching strategies, funding and cater students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Compared to other types, the religious or traditional

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schools have always remained controversial. “Religious education in Pakistan (more specifically Islamic education) has failed to gain the same level of official respectability as secular private schools in the country” (Aijazi & Angeles, 2014, p. 491). Especially, after 9/11 religious schools have been considered as platforms for sheltering and promoting terrorism and considered as a great hazard for humankind (Rahman & Bukhari, 2006). The religious schools have also been criticized for spreading extremist views in the society (Hussain et al., 2011). Moreover, the religious schools have been criticized for not teaching secular subject like sciences and languages and for not reviewing and modernizing their curriculum for years (Nisar, 2010).

The role of religious education in Pakistan cannot be overlooked and ignored. According to Nelson (2008), every child in Pakistan is getting religious education in makhtabs, madrasas, or in their homes where the religious teachers come and teach children at their homes. Despite its importance, religious education in Pakistan has not been studied comprehensively and its various aspects have been ignored (Rahman & Bukhari, 2006). Besides, the religious educational institutions have been considered as platforms for providing an alternative stream of education for those who cannot get opportunities to get education in other types of institutions (Aijazi & Angeles, 2014). Religious education along with spiritual goals may also have moral and civic goals (Robert, 2004). Religious education has been found to be significantly related to learning (Liagkis, 2016).

Keeping in mind the importance of religious schools, countries around the world have taken different initiatives to reform their religious education system by reforming their teacher education institutions (Francis et al., 2014; Teacher Training Commission of The Religious Education Association, 2006). Teacher education institutions play a vital role in bringing cultural and religious harmony by producing prospective teachers who are able to cultivate tolerance, acceptance, patriotism, ethnic and religious respect or incapacitate extremism, sectarian, and discrimination among the prospective nations.

1.1 Objective of the Study

Keeping in view the above background, this current study aimed at exploring the capabilities of prospective teachers in Balochistan to teach in religious schools. The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the perception of prospective teachers and teacher educators about the effectiveness of current teacher education programs in producing teachers for religious schools.
2. To identify the strategies for incorporating changes in teacher education programs to make prospective teachers able to teach in religious schools.

1.2 Research Questions

The study was based on the following questions:

1. How do prospective teachers and teacher educators perceive the effectiveness of current teacher education programs in producing teachers for religious schools?
2. What are the suggested strategies for incorporating changes in teacher education programs to make prospective teachers able to teach in religious schools?

1.3 Delimitations of the Study

Those universities were selected that remained the part of Pre-STEP or Teacher Education Project (TEP) assisted by USAID. The reason behind selection of these universities was their involvement in the transformation of the teacher education programs in Pakistan to make them more comprehensive and effective. Two Universities: University of Balochistan (UoB) and Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU) fulfilled the criteria and therefore were selected as sites. The Institute for Education and Research was the institute offering teacher education in UoB while Department of Education in SBKWU did so.

2. Literature Review

Before the creation of Pakistan, the education system in the sub-continent (India and Pakistan) consisted of two different categories. The religious education aimed at preserving and promoting Islamic religion and culture while British secular education system aimed at producing workforce for them (Rahman & Bukhari, 2006). A *Madrasa* is a religious institution for learning where students are taught different subjects on religion prescribed by an autonomous accreditation body (Aijazi & Angeles, 2014). *Madrasas* can be of three types: full-time- residential, full-time non-residential, and part-time (Nelson, 2008). The main function of Madrasa is to prepare Islamic scholars and provide education to the poor and orphans along with shelter, food and other necessities of life (Hussain et al., 2011).

In Islamic history, the Madrasas were considered as centers for creation of knowledge and research in science, law, medicine other secular subjects. However, now the Madrasas only cater to religious curriculum and show strong resistance towards other secular subjects. This resistance has remained one of the main reasons behind failure of majority of the reform movements to regularize or streamline religious institutions efforts by government of Pakistan (Fakhr-ul-Islam, 2009; Hussain et al., 2011). The first major reform initiative was launched from 1979-1989 during the reign of General Zia-Ul Haq where the national

curriculum and syllabus were revised and rigid Islamic content was embedded in the curriculum (Hussain et al., 2011). The second main attempt was witnessed in the era of General Parvez Musharraf that aimed at reducing the Islamization and religious extremism. Itihad Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP) and Pakistan Madrasa Education Board Ordinance (PMEBO) were established in this era. However, after the operation of Lal Masjid, this reform movement failed (Fakhr-ul-Islam, 2009; Hussain et al., 2011). The reform movements also continued in the government of Asif Ali Zardari with a soft approach through dialogues and discussions. However, this reform movement also failed when the Zardari government attempted to implement a Turkish model of religious education in Pakistan.

In all these reform movements, preparation of teachers for teaching in religious schools was ignored that could play an instrumental role. Because, knowing only religious books is not enough; a religious teacher should also be trained to know and understand students which demands an extensive teacher training program to equip the future teachers to gain required knowledge and skills in philosophy and methods of religious education (Teacher Training Commission of The Religious Education Association, 2006). Zimmerman (2006) conducted a study on Jewish teachers teaching in religious schools and found that majority of them lacked any formal training in teaching in religious schools. Because of this, teachers lacked managerial skills and pedagogical skills in lesson planning and teaching strategies. Teacher education programs train teachers in both theories in subject areas and pedagogy as well as give chance to pre-service teachers to apply the learnt theories practically in school settings.

Teaching in religious schools has been regarded as one of the difficult and tedious jobs (Flensner, 2015). Teacher education programs can play a vital role in developing effective teachers for religious schools as teachers' effectiveness has been found strongly related to the teachers' pre-service training (Deborah et al., 2005). The teacher education program also develops positive self-concept and confidence among future teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) and helps in retaining competent teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Besides, the religious teachers in Pakistan have been found using strict and harsher methods for disciplining students (Nisar, 2010). The pre-service trainings can equip religious teachers with different techniques for using behavior management in their classes which resultantly reduces teachers harshness and aggressiveness (Bromfield, 2006). Not only this, the teacher education programs also help in developing future teacher professional values and their ability in implementing developed professional values in future as school teachers (Mead, 2007).

Moreover, according to a report of UNICEF children in religious schools are not always safe from bullying and violence (UNICEF, 2016). Research indicates that the teachers can better tackle bullying issues in their schools, if they get knowledge about how to combat bullying in their pre-service education programs (Nicolaidis et al., 2002). Most importantly, teacher preparation programs and their duration have been found strongly contributing to the students' learning and achievement (Boyd et al., 2008).

Thus, teacher education programs can help in reforming religious education in Pakistan. Teachers need training opportunities in order to be successful religious teachers to transfer religious knowledge to the students (Zimmerman, 2006). However, in teacher training programs, the preparation of teachers to teach in religious schools have been given least attention (Foster, 1999). Besides, religious teachers are given limited opportunities for in-service trainings (Hanlon, 2000) and enriching their subject matter knowledge (McCreery, 2005).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted qualitative, exploratory research design. Qualitative research designs are used when the purpose is to gain in-depth knowledge in a study from the participants' perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). More specifically, the research design of the study was based on case study where the public universities of Balochistan offering teacher education programs were selected as sites of the study.

3.2 Population of Study

All teacher educators and prospective teachers from the universities that remained part of Pre-STEP or Teacher Education Project (TEP) assisted by USAID constituted the population of the study. 20 teacher educators and 300 prospective teachers constituted the size of population.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study consisted of selected teacher educators and prospective teachers from UoB and SBKWU. Purposive sampling technique was used which is considered as one of the most suitable techniques for choosing sample for the case study designs (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). 10 teacher educators (5+5) and 10 prospective teachers (5+5) were selected as sample for interviews while two groups of prospective teachers (5 participants in each) were selected from the both case universities for focus group interviews.

3.4 Instrumentation

For data collection, an interview protocol was developed consisting questions related to capabilities of current prospective teachers to teach in religious schools and strategies for incorporating changes in teacher education programs to make prospective teachers able to teach in religious schools. The interview protocols were designed in English and Urdu Language. Probing questions were also used by the researchers where needed. The interview protocol was sent to two experts from the field for review. After conducting individual interviews, a focus group interviews was conducted in each university for the purpose of triangulation.

3.5 Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 5 teacher educators and 5 prospective teachers from SBKWU and UOB. The interview sessions ranged from 20 to 25 minutes. In addition, two focused group interview sessions were conducted with prospective teachers from SBKWU and UoB. Both types of interviews were transcribed and were coded for analysis using ATLAS.ti 7 software.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Being a pure qualitative case study design, the data analysis initiated with data collection. Thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used as a method for data analysis. Theamtic analysis is the most coomon type of analysis technique and due to its theoretical flexiblity for emergence of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

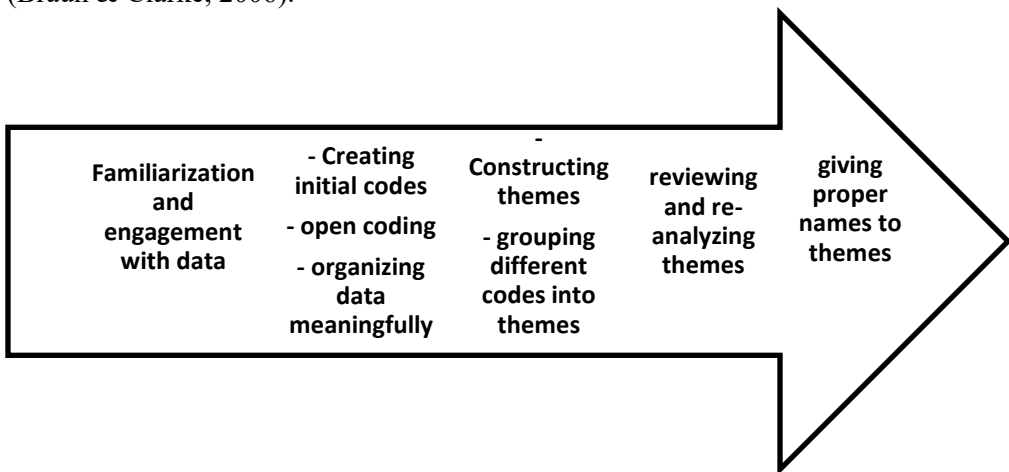


Figure 1: Thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Data analysis revealed the following themes:

4.1 Adequacy of Current Teacher Education Program

The data analysis revealed that some of the teacher educators and prospective teachers perceived current teacher education programs in Balochistan adequate and efficient for teachers teaching in religious schools. According to them, the current courses being taught train prospective teachers in various pedagogical skills and these pedagogical skills are fruitful for religious schools as for others. For example, a teacher educator from SBKWU (U1) claimed, “The teaching methods and pedagogical skills are being provided to the teacher educators and to some extent, these are enough for a teacher to teach in any type of institution” (U1TE1). Similarly, a prospective teacher shared, “the subjects in a formal school and a religious school can be different but the methods for teaching can be same” (U1FT1). A teacher educator from UoB (U2) shared, “Yes, our student teachers can teach in religious schools but they have to put their personal efforts...personal learning in Islamic courses” (U2TE2). Another prospective teacher added, “Yes, they can teach in religious schools, but obviously there are some issues... they can teach if Madrasas introduce other subjects like mathematics and science” (U2TE1).

4.2 Revision of the Current Teacher Education Programs

Some of the teacher educators and prospective teachers considered the current teacher education program insufficient and lacked skills and competencies required by prospective teachers to teach in religious schools. Therefore, they felt the need to revise and update the current teacher education programs in Balochistan. A prospective teacher claimed, “We have not been taught any subject that gives us skills to teach in a religious school. I recommend it should be reviewed and revised (U1FT 3). A teacher added:

The gap is in our curriculum. We teach only two courses and these are not enough. We should introduce a different program for them...We have three departments in our institute like department of higher educations, physical education. We should also introduce a department of religious educations. I think ... those students who are interested, should be provided the platform (U2TE3).

Another prospective teacher added, “You cannot expect us to teach in a religious school after teaching only two courses related to Islamic education. I think more courses should be included” (U1FGD). While a teacher educator said, “I think our teachers are not properly trained to teach in religious school. As we are not teaching them *Nazra*, Quran, and other religion related subjects. Our curriculum needs to be modified” (U1TE2). A prospective teacher in this regard mentioned:

I can teach in a Madrasa. But, I am not an expert and unfortunately our department is not providing us the knowledge and skills required for teaching in a Madrasa... our curriculum should be revised and more specialization courses should be offered (U2FT5).

4.3 Need for a New Teacher Education Program for Teaching in Religious Schools

Majority of the participants from both universities were in favor of introducing a new and carefully designed Teacher Education program. According to the participants, the current Teacher Education Programs are not capable of producing trained teachers able to teach in Madrasa, which have totally different organizational culture and climate. In this regard, a teacher educator claimed:

There is a huge difference between the syllabus that we are teaching here and the syllabus being taught in a religious school. I do not think that our students can teach better than religious scholars can. However, I recommend that a course, a specialized course should be introduced of eight months to one year to prepare our prospective teachers to teach in religious schools... involving both educationists and religious scholars. We can only be successful if we cooperate with each other's in order to do something better for our prospective teachers (U2TE1).

A teacher educator from SBKWU said, "The demands for teaching in a Madrasa are totally different. Therefore, a new program should be designed for teachers teaching in religious schools" (U1TE4, Teaching *Islamiyat*). On the other hand, the prospective teachers also mentioned that they might not be able to teach in religious schools and demanded for a new teacher education program for teaching in religious schools. From the focus group discussion, a prospective teacher revealed:

We have not thought of teaching in religious schools, as this concept has not been discussed by our trainers. Therefore, I recommend that at the first day of entering into the teacher education program the prospective teachers should be told of that they can be teachers in religious schools as well and their training course should be totally different (U2FGD).

4.4 Miscellaneous Findings and Recommendations from Participants

The nature of semi-structured interviews, open discussions, and open coding procedures also helped to emerge some codes that researchers thought of as worthy of discussing. Firstly, some of the prospective teachers did not like the idea of teaching in Madrasas. For them it was simply not possible for them to teach in a religious institution. A prospective teacher argued, "I would never join a religious school; I would not apply if the post are available for. I cannot fit in the conservative environment of a Madrasa" (U2FT1). A prospective teacher

from SBKWU shared, “I cannot teach in Madrasa (U1FT3). Another prospective teacher added, “No, a teacher trained by current teacher education programs cannot teach in a religious schools as the subjects being taught in Madrassas need in-depth understanding and reflections and very careful teaching that is not possible.... (U1FT2).

The participants also gave some suggestions in this regard. They recommended closing the gap between teacher educational institutes and religious schools. A teacher educator said, “Our institute can only be successful when we develop stronger relation and coordination between teacher education institutions and religious institutions” (U1TE 5). “We should visit the religious schools to understand their needs, their system and then develop strategies to minimize the gaps. That can be a strategy to minimize the negative image of Madrasas that they produce terrorists” (U2TE4).

5. Discussion

This study shed important light on the importance of teacher training required for religious schools in Balochistan, Pakistan. Firstly, it was found that the concept of preparation of prospective teachers for teaching in religious schools is almost lacking in the teacher education programs in Balochistan. In either M.Ed. or M.A Education programs, there is not a single subject being taught in both universities. In B.Ed. (Hons.), one course of *Islamiyat* and one course is Teaching of *Islamiyat*. These both courses are designed to prepare prospective teachers to teach *Islamiyat* at public elementary schools. Thus, these courses also do not support and equip prospective teachers to teach in any religious schools. The findings are supported by (Zimmerman, 2006) who found that majority of Jewish religious school teachers lack formal training to teach in religious schools. In contrast, the Teacher Training Commission of The Religious Education Association (2006) introduced an extensive two years program for elementary religious teacher education program to train future teachers in both philosophy and method of religious education.

Secondly, it was found that the current teacher education program, to some extent, may help prospective teachers to learn the required pedagogical skills or teaching strategies to teach in all types of schools including in religious schools. Various religious schools in Pakistan have started introducing subjects like Mathematics, Science and English. The prospective teachers can teach these subjects in the religious schools. However, the pedagogical skills without full command on subject knowledge, in-depth understanding and reflections on religious aspects are not enough. Therefore, the teacher education programs need to be reviewed in terms of preparing teachers for religious schools. Moreover, to achieve this objective a new teacher education program should be designed by

involving both the religious scholars and the educationist. The findings are in lined with McCreery (2005) that religious teachers are given limited opportunities for enriching their subject matter knowledge.

Moreover, a majority of the religious schools in Balochistan are free and running on donations from the community members. Such donation is being spent on food, books, and shelter (for full-time students). Therefore, the teachers are paid less than other types of schools. The funding from the government is almost zero, which makes the selection of religious schools as the last option or a temporary option for well-trained teachers. Government should take some serious steps for streamlining and owning the religious schools. Favorable working conditions, appropriate infrastructure and salary packages may attract and retained well-trained teachers to teach in religious schools. The literature review indicated that in many countries, religious schools get funding from the government (Hanlon, 2000).

This study has some limitations as well. Firstly, being qualitative study, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. Therefore, it is suggested that such studies should be conducted in all universities of Pakistan having teacher training departments as well as more quantitative and mixed method research studies should be conducted. In addition, future researchers may include teacher-training colleges of Balochistan to incorporate the views of teacher educators and prospective teachers about role of teacher education in preparing teachers for teaching in religious schools.

6. Conclusion

A large number of children in Balochistan attend religious schools (Madrasas) that can play a very vital role in uplifting the literacy rate in remote and conservative parts of Balochistan. Various reform efforts have been done in Pakistan but there are various challenges that led to failure in this regard. The researchers think that teacher education institutions can play an important role in revolutionizing religious education by producing quality-trained teachers.

7. Recommendations

To reform religious education in Pakistan, following recommendations are proposed:

1. Commitment and very careful planning and policy development from government of Pakistan is required to restructure religious education.
2. A new program should be launched in teacher education institutions for training teachers to teach in religious schools with required content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

3. Government of Pakistan should involve experts in religion and teacher education to devise policies and programs for religious teacher education programs for Pakistan.
4. The certified teachers from teacher education institutions should only be allowed to join the teaching profession in religious schools and such teachers should be given same salary packages and career progression opportunities like government school teachers.
5. The teachers already teaching in religious schools should be given opportunities for in-service trainings and exposures.

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