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**INTENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPERIENCE OF
TEACHING HUMAN RIGHTS: CASE FOR PAKISTANI
SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

This paper is based on doctoral research conducted to explore the opportunities and barriers regarding teaching human rights concepts within three different school systems in Pakistan. The study comprised an in-depth study using a qualitative research approach. It investigated the understandings of teachers and other stakeholders about human rights, their perceptions about the place of human rights within the existing school curriculum and human rights teaching practices through Social Studies and Islamic Studies subjects in a range of schools. A variety of data collected was analysed through the use of layers of analysis. Two frameworks i.e., first: curriculum intent, implementation, and experience at the horizontal level, and second: learning for, through and about human rights at the vertical level were used. The study found that there is a gap between policy and practice regarding teaching human rights at the school level and more barriers than opportunities in delivering human rights education at the school level. However, the availability of human rights content in the core policy documents including Pakistan's constitution, education policy and curriculum and teachers and headteachers' willingness to teach human rights at the school level offers a way forward to taking this important but neglected area to the attention of the policy makers in Pakistan.

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1. Introduction and Background

This study was based in Pakistan, a country under considerable socio-economic stress. Being a developing country, Pakistan faces many challenges, such as poverty, a weak democratic system, security issues, gender disparities at all levels, and a poor education system (Jahangir, 2000; Pasha 2018). Pakistan ranks low on the lists of most of global and international indicators, including education. It is ranked 154th (of 189 countries) in the Human Development Index (HDI) in the Human Development Report (HDR) of 2020 (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2021).

The state of education in Pakistan is also generally considered weak (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016; Benz, 2012), and this has led to millions of children being either deprived of basic schooling or not receiving quality education, even if they attend school. The SDG Index for Pakistan 2018 Report categorises Pakistan's efforts on Goal 4 (Quality Education) as "too far away to achieve the goal" (Umar & Asghar, 2018, p. 15). Pakistan has also failed to meet the Education for All (EFA) target for universal primary education, with the EFA 2015 Review noting "one third of primary school age children are out of school and 42% population (age 10+) is illiterate" (Academy of Education Planning & Management [AEPAM], 2014, p. 2). The report also highlighted wider gender disparities, such as 32 million illiterate women aged 15 years or more, compared to 19 million men of the same ages, and 3.7 million primary school-age girls remaining out of school, compared to 2.9 million boys of the same category. According to Barber (2010),

Pakistan is without a good education system. Indeed, if we are to speak plainly – as the times require – we must admit that the current education system is very poor indeed and the major reason behind this failure is the lack of political will by the governments. (p. 2)

The literature suggests that there is no structured and formal teaching of human rights concepts in Pakistani schools (Iqbal, 2005; Pirzado, 2013), this study has explored the gap between policy and practice in regard to teaching human rights in schools and advocates the teaching of this important but neglected area. Its findings have implications for the policy and implementation of human rights teaching in Pakistani schools.

1.1. Human Rights in Pakistan

Pakistan's commitment to human rights can be seen officially at national and international levels. One of the country's major documents, the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 2012) promises equal rights to all citizens, outlaws discrimination on the basis of race or language, and affirms steps to ensure full participation of women and men in all spheres of life. Internationally, Pakistan is signatory to many human rights documents, including the UDHR and most recently the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which demonstrate Pakistan's obligation towards human rights for its people. Despite these promises and on-paper commitments to human rights, the lived situation of human rights in the country is regarded as poor (Ali, 2000). The implementation of the rights outlined in the constitution has not been successful, a strong contributing factor being the involvement of military governments in the political process (Jahangir, 2000). Pakistan has seen few completed tenures of democratic governments, with elected governments displaced

by military coups on several occasions (Shah, 2014). Typically, when the military takes over, human rights are at risk because the military leadership suspends the constitution and bypasses the guidelines outlined in the constitution.

The rights of children are important and need to be protected in society; however, the situation of the rights of children in Pakistan is worsening (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2020). Widespread cases of violation of children's rights, including sexual abuse and violence, are reported in the country and gender inequality persists at all levels (Amnesty International, 2020). Cases of abuse of both girls and boys are reported on a daily basis, with Sahil¹ (2020) noting 778 cases of abductions, 405 missing children, 348 sodomy cases, 279 rape cases, including 210 attempted rapes, 205 gang sodomy, and 115 gang rapes. This shows that despite Pakistan's commitment to children's rights, they are being violated widely. Such practices are an offence to both Islam and secular human rights.

Child labour is another human rights issue that is a common problem across all areas of Pakistan, both rural and urban, with many working the agriculture sector, domestic work or small workshops (HRCP, 2020). Figures suggest that as many as 21.5 per cent of children in Sindh province and 12.4 per cent in Punjab province are engaged in child labour (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Corporal punishment is cited as one of the major reasons for the high rates of school dropouts; for example, a survey found that 31.3 per cent of students who attended primary schools in Pakistan had dropped out, and corporal punishment was the most common reason given (Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child [SPARC], 2017).

If poor parents cannot afford to send all children to school, they prefer to educate their sons rather than their daughters (Qureshi et al., 2007). There are widespread gender disparities in Pakistan at various levels, which is a reason the country is ranked at 141 out of 142 countries on the Gender Gap Index (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2016). The report shows:

- 48 per cent literacy rate for females compared to 71 per cent for males,
- 54 per cent net enrolment rates for girls compared to 60 per cent for boys,
- 13 per cent of women owning any asset compared to 69 per cent of men,
- 13 per cent of women working in the service sector compared to 36% males, and
- lower women's participation in political process than is the case with men.

These statistics illustrate that Pakistan is still very far from achieving gender equality and education can play an important role in narrowing these gaps.

1.2. Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education (HRE) promotes awareness about human rights and ways of information sharing among the community at large, particularly students and parents, to develop skills to oppose violations of human rights (Tibbitts, 1996). The emphasis on HRE can be traced back in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2017), and gained attention in 1970s. In 1974, UNESCO undertook to put HRE on the agenda of its General Conference and member states unanimously adopted the recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation, peace and

¹ Sahil is a non-government organisation working on child protection, especially against child sexual abuse in Pakistan. Source: <https://sahil.org/>.

fundamental freedoms (Horn, 2009). On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the declaration of the UDHR in 1980, the first international congress on the teaching of human rights advocated special efforts to promote human rights, particularly by stressing education. The speakers at the conference recommended recognition for HRE and proposed comprehensive models for it in and beyond schools (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1980).

The United Nations Children's Fund (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2007) uses a similar conceptual framework to highlight the need for a holistic approach to education:

- **The right of access to education:** Education throughout all stages of childhood and beyond, availability and accessibility of education and equality of opportunity.
- **The right to quality education:** A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum, rights-based learning and assessment, and child-friendly, safe and healthy environments.
- **The right to respect in the learning environment:** Respect for identity, respect for participation rights, and respect for integrity.

HRE has been approached through various perspectives and viewpoints. The content and pedagogies suggested for HRE are subject to the aims and goals set for education (Bajaj, 2011). Nevertheless, many scholars and practitioners emphasise that in order to achieve HRE goals, the pedagogical approaches need to be dynamic, holistic, and transformative (Bajaj 2011; Flowers, 2000; Tibbitts, 2002). Similarly, Gerber (2017) asserts, "In human rights education, pedagogy should be developed that is child-friendly, motivating, participatory and empowering" (p. 200). Hence, the underlying philosophy of HRE is critical pedagogy (Flowers, 2000), which can be traced back to Freire's (1970, 1974) notion of "critical consciousness" for transforming the world by reflecting and engaging with it for a better and just society. As discussed in the previous section, the Article 2 of UNDHRET also points to the transformative nature of HRE from the perspective of learning about human rights, learning through human rights, and learning for human rights (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2021). Education about human rights, includes knowledge and understanding of human rights norms, principles, and values; education through human rights refers to the perception and creation of respect, empathy, and compassion towards each other's rights; and education for human rights refers to learning that leads to empowerment, action, and behaviour towards the observance and exercising of human rights, as well as their violation (Bajaj, 2011; Mihr, 2012; Tibbitts, 2017).

1.3. Human Rights Education in Pakistan

There is limited research on the topic of HRE in Pakistani schools and curricula (Pirzado, 2019). The private sector has introduced a few small-scale and short-term initiatives related to HRE such as peace education, but the public sector education system has not instituted any regular or long-term programs (Iqbal, 2005). Despite this, civil society has the potential to become a stakeholder in the building of consensus on the basic principles of human rights (Jahangir, 2000), and civil society organisations may yet promote human rights through education and mount pressure on the government to place human rights on the political agenda. In Pakistan, there is a dearth of proactive rights-based education based on critical pedagogy, due to structural bottlenecks in design and implementation (Farid & Chaudhary, 2022). However, the education policy provides avenues for more spaces to rights-based education to minorities

and the marginalised. The introduction of a multi-faith curriculum that gives freedom of choice to religious minorities to choose their religion as a subject instead of Islamic studies and ethics is one such example (Panjwani & Chaudhary, 2022). A review of past studies of HRE in Pakistan confirms that there has been no in-depth research on human rights in schools, although there were some smaller short-term initiatives. This gap highlights the need for further research on HRE in Pakistan, which this study attempts to fill.

2. Purpose of the Study

The landscape of quality education in Pakistan exposes several challenges that need resolution, such as community, religious and political tensions. Also, there appears to be a lack of commitment to translate policy into practice, with little evidence of research on teaching of human rights in the Pakistani school system. According to Baela Raza Jamil, a senior educationist in Pakistan and owner of an education NGO, “The peace and citizenship projects in Pakistan are still largely donor-funded and have not really been integrated into the education system, however the debate on peace education in Pakistan is alive and vibrant, at least amongst civil society” (in Srinivasan, 2009, p. 14).

There is little evidence and research on HRE in Pakistani schools, and HRE initiatives are mostly initiated by the NGO sector and donor funded (Srinivasan, 2009). Nevertheless, it is encouraging that there is at least some vibrancy among the NGOs and civil society, which can become a model to build on for HRE. Although HRE has never been formally included in the school curriculum and/or education policy in Pakistan, there are topics, similar to those discussed above, such as gender, patriotism, civic duties etc., emphasized briefly within the Social Studies primary level curriculum in Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 2009).

This doctoral study was the first in-depth research study on teaching human rights in Pakistani schools. It will help formulate implications for the improvement of HRE and add new knowledge about the landscape of teaching human rights concepts in Pakistan and highlight the opportunities and barriers in doing so.

3. Research Questions

What are the opportunities and barriers regarding teaching human rights concepts within the school systems in Pakistan?

- How are human rights understood and manifested at various layers of the education system?
- In what ways do curricula and teaching practice support human rights education?

4. Methodology

This study employed a Qualitative research approach, since this approach sets out to understand and interpret the meaning of a situation being studied, from a variety of viewpoints (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research concerns itself with understanding the participants’ experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009, p. 24) further explains that “Qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, and how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings. This study is framed by a framework i.e., the

use of intent, implementation, and experience (Davis, 1994) to analyse the curriculum in the Pakistani context. While Davis (1994) used this model to investigate layers of language policy, this study employed it to investigate the inter-relationships of three layers of the curriculum:

Curriculum intent is policy-level intention for human rights. In this study, three core policy documents were analysed: (a) the Constitution of Pakistan, (b) the Education Policy, and (c) the Curriculum of Social Studies and Islamic Studies. This analysis indicates the extent to which these documents focus on human rights. Intentions for human rights at the policy level show a commitment to implement them at the school level via the curriculum.

Curriculum implementation shows the translation of the policy into textbooks, which is the first, or in some cases only, resource for teachers to use at the classroom level. In this study, implementation was shown through analyses of Social Studies and Islamic Studies textbooks. If the textbooks were to truly reflect the spirit of teaching human rights concepts as they are explained at policy-level documents, they could help the implementation of HRE at the school level. This section helps to understand how the intentions of the policy are implemented through textbooks.

Curriculum experience is labelled here as classroom experience. Teachers' understandings and practices of human rights help students comprehend the concepts. This goes beyond implementation since the experiences of teachers and students serve as indicators of whether the policy and curriculum objectives are achieved. This study gathered data through interviews and classroom observations to produce a clear picture of how the curriculum was experienced in the participating schools.

This framework was also used to investigate the extent and nature of congruence between each of these three layers. This is based on the premise that curriculum goals are consistent with government policies, and their implementation is reflected at the school levels.

Below is an overview of research methods used for the study.

Table 1. Overview of Research Methods

| Framework | Research Method | Data source |
|----------------|---------------------|---|
| Intent | Document analysis | Documents: National social and education policy core documents, i.e., constitution, education policy and curriculum. |
| | Interviews | Government policy makers, university teachers and education researchers. |
| Implementation | Document analysis | Documents: Learning objectives and textbooks of Social Studies and Islamic Studies at primary and middle school levels. |
| | Interviews | Government officials, university teachers, education researchers etc. |
| Experience | Lesson observations | Social Studies and Islamic Studies lessons |
| | Interviews | Teachers and headteachers / principals. |

The primary data was collected from 12 schools through lesson observations of Social Studies and Islamic Studies and interviews with teachers, principals, and education stakeholders such as policy makers, researchers and university teachers.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study offer some important insights into human rights education presented through the text of core government policy documents related to education and show the extent to which the intent has been translated into the implementation and experience level.

To gauge the intent of human rights education, the text in the core policy documents was analysed. The core documents were reviewed, starting from the country's constitution that outlines the principles for developing policies for the whole nation and sets the national context, including education. The study found that these principles are manifested in the education policy, ideally to provide strategic direction that in turn translates into curriculum, and ultimately provides guidelines for textbooks development. In fact, what was found in this study was that the constitution contained significant human rights elements and the content in this highest policy document is rich. A country's constitution protects the rights of citizens without any discrimination and bias. This confirms that Pakistan acknowledges the importance of rights for all citizens (Government of Pakistan, 2012). Further, the constitution is manifested through legislation.

The document analysis shows that the education policy of 2009 also incorporates human rights concepts, namely, dignity, social justice, and democracy (Government of Pakistan, 2009). However, the current HRE policy does not include the rule of law and violations of human rights such as slavery and torture. While excluding such concepts might not be deliberate, it is clear that there is lack of sensitivity and seriousness among education policy makers in regard to the inclusion of complex human rights issues in the curriculum. The 2009 education policy is considered an inclusive policy that incorporates suggestions from educators at every level. The partial inclusion of HRE in the policy suggests a generally low emphasis by the education policy makers. Keeping in mind the prevalence of human right violations in Pakistani society, it is imperative to discuss these issues through education. Nevertheless, the objectives of the policy show a favourable stance towards HR, with one of them being "Creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution" (Government of Pakistan, 2009, p. 17).

In analysing the national curriculum, the human rights concepts were found to be integrated into the subject of Social Studies, Islamic Studies, and languages with varied emphases. The study noted that the Social Studies curriculum includes dedicated human rights related topics, both explicit and implicit topics related to human rights such as democracy, citizenship, freedom of opinion, human dignity, equality, and cultural diversity since the subject itself focuses on how people live and operate in a society. The review of the Islamic Studies curriculum was found to contain themes related to moral aspects of human rights such as dignity, equality, and diversity. These are implicitly referred to under moral themes such as brotherhood, moderation, modesty, and respect. The inclusion of human rights in this subject is perhaps due to the nature of Islamic Studies, which is concerned with raising good human beings who respect and follows guidelines of the Qur'an (Government of Pakistan, 2006). While the review of Urdu and English language curricula shows a focus on reading and writing skills, these subjects do incorporate some concepts to develop students' understandings of human rights. Examples of these were ethics, character building and culture.

At the implementation level, the translation of the curriculum into textbooks shows variation in the number and type of human rights topics offered to schools from four different school systems participated

in this study. The analysis shows that in government schools, the textbooks used are prepared by a government publisher, whereas three private school systems use textbooks from three different private publishers. The study found that representation of human rights concepts in these textbooks is not standardised, owing to the fact that the extent to which each system follows the national education curriculum is different.

At the school level, the experience of human rights was investigated through teacher perceptions and understanding of human rights, as well as their observed teaching practices in the classroom. The classroom analysis suggests little difference between teachers' perceptions and practices, and the textbooks they use. It is worth outlining the difficult circumstances in Pakistani schools, as discerned from the literature. In Pakistan, 29% of schools are single-teacher schools, and in Sindh province this figure rises to 47% (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2019). Further, the quality of teachers in the primary public schools is also poor; teachers are not prepared well and unfamiliar with up-to-date teaching methods (Chang, 2014). In this situation, it is not surprising to know that teachers have a varied understanding of human rights concepts seen in the fact that although many of the participating teachers were able to define human rights concepts briefly, they were not able to capture the concept in depth. The concepts they identified as human rights were concerned with ways to fulfil basic needs such as access to food, education, health, and income, while some related human rights with religion and opined that both religion and human rights are guidelines for peaceful life.

Teachers' training is one dimension that could affect their perception and practices in terms of human rights. The literature includes positive examples where teachers transformed their classes after receiving training opportunities (Qureshi et al., 2005). According to some of the teachers and other stakeholders, the lack of teacher training opportunities is a barrier in improving teachers' capacity to teach well. However, the willingness of teachers to impart human rights related themes in the classroom is positive, but to what extent this willingness remains present in the light of the demanding workload poses a problem. Classroom teaching practice is the site of human rights education. The UNDHRET framework used in this study suggests three-level of competencies that a teacher should impart for effective human rights teaching, learning about human rights, learning through human rights, and learning for human rights. Once again, there was variation in the amount of time and attention given to these three aspects.

The findings suggest that when it comes to learning about human rights, most teachers use textbooks as major source of information, but do not access any additional sources of information to support the topic further. Thus, due to the decisions made by publishers, this meant that they follow only those topics which are included in the textbooks. Also, as it was found that most teachers are not fully aware about the curriculum, so they lack the knowledge about what should be included in the textbooks and do not pursue topics which are not included in the textbooks. In terms of the human rights that students were offered in the classroom, the audit of content showed that the most common topics that emerged during the observations were history and background of human rights and concepts, such as universality and equality, citizenship, democracy and elections and topics related to morals and ethics.

This finding aligns somewhat with Nussbaum (2006), who emphasises that schools should provide learning which brings creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and citizenship concepts among children. This finding suggests that the gaps in student knowledge will be in complex issues such as slavery, torture,

and rule of law. The implication for Pakistani students is that the textbooks should cover all range of human rights as suggested by the policy and curriculum documents for a cohesive and peaceful nation.

For education through human rights, there are very few instances where teachers demonstrated the ability to model human rights attitudes and behaviours through participatory teaching methodologies. Such strategies might have included small group discussions, sharing real life examples, role plays and opportunities for students to actively engage in discussions to understand the topic well. While some of the teachers made efforts to use a variety of teaching methods for example brainstorming, and preparing speeches, most teachers used lecture and reading from the textbook, that do not provoke thinking on human rights, or engage students. This classroom situation shows that the majority of teachers lack skills to teach human rights concepts through active involvement of students, and merely transfer the knowledge and information through traditional teaching methods. The review of textbooks identified that there were suggested teaching strategies given in some of the lessons, but few teachers were observed following those ideas. This shows that most teachers only follow the content in the lessons rigidly and do not focus on ways of working. There is a complete section in the curriculum document which provides suggested teaching strategies, but it appears that most teachers were not oriented with those strategies, mainly due to lack of training or familiarity with the curriculum.

The third level is education for human rights, which entails opportunities to build actions that promote a culture of exercising human rights in school and beyond. None of the participating classroom observations exhibited classroom practices encouraging actions, such as working on small projects to be carried out in the community or to practise skills learned from a lesson. None of the participating teachers demonstrated the activities which would link or relate to exercising the human rights concepts in school or community, presenting lack of opportunities to practise skills as citizens of a peaceful and respectful nation, reflecting the education policy, which is to enable children to become good human beings and responsible citizens (Government of Pakistan, 2009).

The findings indicate that human rights education in Pakistan has a number of pedagogical gaps with reference to the UNDHRET framework. The information about human rights is provided, but teaching strategies are not aligned to human rights, and action-related activities are entirely absent from the schools participating in the study. Such gaps imply that there should be regular opportunities for teacher training, not just content driven, but to address pedagogy and action.

In summary, while the policy intentions are favourable to human rights education indicated in the highest level of policy documents, these do not find expression at the implementation and experience levels. The gaps lie in a lack of focus on human rights in the textbooks as suggested by the policy and curriculum documents due to textbook publishing decisions. Further gaps emerge when looking at the experience at classroom level such as limited teacher skills in using effective pedagogy for teaching human rights, which cause incomplete understanding of how content needs to match pedagogy and action.

6. Conclusion

This study has analysed the landscape of human rights education in Pakistan. Integrating human rights education in the Pakistani education system requires advocacy at every level of the education system, from policy level to the classroom and community level. It is important to put efforts through advocacy and

embarking on common ground, along with the integration of human rights themes in the relevant subjects, and to re-think classroom approaches accordingly. This study focused on an area that was not previously researched thoroughly in a Pakistani context. Human rights are generally considered as a western agenda among the common masses, and human rights seen as imported from the western world. So, for teaching human rights to students, teachers themselves must understand the true sense and spirit of human rights and use positive examples of human rights promotion with Pakistani context. There is a need for consistent efforts to build on opportunities and existing positives and bring human rights to the forefront in the Pakistani education system. This study has foreshadowed some ways in which that might be done and build a case for human rights education in Pakistani schools.

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