

Language of Peace or Violence? Content Analysis of School Curriculum in Pakistan*

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Abstract

This research article investigates the language of peace and violence in textbooks and literature taught to students at the school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The militancy-hit province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa education curriculum is selected as a case study in this research, especially focusing on the textbooks taught as compulsory subjects to students of the class of 9th and 10th in high schools. The contents of the school curriculum are evaluated and interpreted thematically in the light of different discourses. For this purpose, we have used qualitative content analysis techniques in this study. Relevant data is extracted from the selected textbooks and categorized into various themes. The data was analyzed in the light of different discourses of peace education and curriculum development. Peace education has been used as a theoretical framework to analyse the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa school curriculum. Findings reveal that structural violence exists in the contents of school textbooks, in which war and conflict are frequently mentioned and mostly glorified in the different subjects of the school curriculum in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is also found that the text of the books sometimes creates cleavages that polarize society based on religion, race, culture and ethnic identity. Furthermore, several contents in these books tend to promote the hegemony of some ethnic and religious groups while other ethnic and religious minorities are relegated to second-class citizens. To promote peace education and diversity, it is necessary to revisit the textbooks to strengthen national harmony. It is inevitable to initiate reforms in the educational curriculum of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Keywords: Textbooks; Violence; Polarization; Structural Violence; Peace Education.

Background of the Problem

After the independence, Pakistan designs school curricula to glorify war and war heroes (Ahmed & Shahzad, 2021). It is a fact that Pakistan gained independence through peaceful political struggle. However, the school curriculum is a tool to create an ethnocentric national discourse for creating a sense of common Muslim and Pakistani identity (Badshah, Ejaz, & Alam, 2020). Glorification of war and division based on ethnic and religious identities are visible in school curricula in Pakistan. It is perceived that the warrior nation can protect the national and ideological boundaries of the country (Muhammad, 2016). The two-nation theory is taught in the school curriculum to reflect on Hindu and Muslim identity (Saigol, 2005; Giunchi, 2007). The two-nation theory gives a sense of identity and tries to create integration in Pakistan as a state (Ahmed, 2018). The division is reflected in the school curriculum to divide the world between "us" and "them" to produce internal coherence (Mumtaz, 2019). Moreover, in the school textbook wars that took place between Muslims and non-Muslims at various points in history are glorified to strengthen the national ideology of Pakistan (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Along with this, the school curriculum some of the contents promotes national and global harmony based on humanities.

The current research aims to analyze selected textbooks taught at high schools in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan to see their role in the promotion of violence and radical ideas based on ethno-cultural and religious identities. This research particularly evaluates the contents of the educational curriculum at the secondary school level to see how much role it plays in promoting both cultural (hate speech, ethnocentrism, racism) and direct violence in the context of cultural and religious discourses. It is pertinent to mention that the approach adopted in this study is critical and focuses more on "violent narratives" found in the

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textbook. At the same time, however, we have also analyzed and elaborated upon the "peaceful narratives" found in the books selected for this study. We aim to identify the violence and peace-promoting contents in the textbooks to make a case for reforms in the curriculum being taught at various levels. The end goal and recommendation of this research are to shift the focus from violence to peace and humanity in the textbooks. Given that Pakistan has been suffering from terrorism and violent extremism, it is high time to investigate the roots of violent extremism in textbooks and also in the literature to counter violent narratives in Pakistan to maintain desirable peace and national harmony. Extremism in all socio-cultural, political and sectarian considers a threat to the existence of Pakistan.

Aims of the Study

This research aimed to investigate social exclusion, polarization, and violence as reflected in the school curriculum and how it might feed into strengthened extremism in Pakistan as well as in the whole of South Asia. Specifically, the study aimed to identify the various discursive strategies and techniques in the textbooks that might help to promote violence or peace. By exposing the violent narratives in the textbooks, the study intends to create a debate on the need for curriculum reform to strengthen inclusion, tolerance, humanity and diversity in the country. This study also aims to promote peace education and curb extremism through educational reforms in Pakistan specifically in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Literature Review

Education plays a vital role in both peace promotion and also in spreading extremism across the world (Ghosh, Chan, Manuel, & Dilimulati, 2017; Taher, Khan, Alduais, & Muthanna, 2022). Education is a tool for gaining knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and cultural identity. Several theorists claim that education plays an important role in the (re) formation of human behaviours/perceptions. Education is a form of politics (Youdell, 2010). Schooling in any state is not neutral and different nation's states promote their vested interest through education (Harackiewicz, Smith & Priniski, 2016). States always include those things in the textbook which promote their interest or the interest of the elites. Schooling can be used for both freedom and oppression of the citizens (Bell, 2016; Rata, 2012). Education is perceived as a tool for either promoting peace or fueling violence. Different states or non-state actors try to use education for their interests at the global level (Haavelsrud, 2009; Alkan, Bayhan, & Abar, 2023). Therefore, sometimes high literacy rate does not ensure peace across the globe. It is important to visit school textbooks to ensure peace, prosperity, democracy, and justice in any state and society (Raja, 2005).

Moreover, education strengthens or reinforces national identity (Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, & Awal, 2012; Alkan, Özar, & Ünver, 2021). For this purpose, the formal education system is targeted to create national identities that serve the interests of the elites. Primary and secondary school curricula are designed to inculcate national ideology (Habermas, 1990; Adeney & Lall, 2005). In this regard, Apple (2001) believed that education plays a key role in strengthening state-defined identity. States design or manipulate school curricula to create different identities that are suited to the ruling class (Bishop & Glynn 2003). Children can be easily influenced through the school curriculum (Yarlagadda, 2012; Tawil, & Harley, 2004). All nation-states try to manipulate curriculum to inculcate their national ideology (Alkan, Serçemeli, & Özmen, 2022). However, in weak democracies, education has been used as a political tool to achieve the vested interest of the elite especially in third-world countries (Smith, 2017).

Pakistan as a state has always emphasised "Religious Nationalism" because Islam has been viewed as the only way to unite the multi-ethnic groups (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Therefore, it is common to note that everything in Pakistan is coloured with the two-nation theory including textbooks. For example, textbooks are published only for the specific political interests of the elites. The school curriculum of Pakistan portrayed Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan as a religious man and subside his secular vision (Khursheed & Ullah, 2022). Through curriculum changes, Dictator Zia Ul Haq legitimizes his illegal rule in Pakistan and distorts the secular vision of the founder of Pakistan (Zaidi, 2011). He used the school curriculum for his religious-nationalist agenda. Resultantly, changes in the school curriculum in his time-deprived students of developing critical thinking and exposed them to sectarianism (Antal, 2008). It has been ignored in the Pakistan education system to promote diversity and inclusion (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

Moreover, teachers are reluctant to answer students due to fear and radicalization. Teachers are also not trained to develop skills for organizing classroom debates (Fahira, Hassan, Malik, & Yousuf, 2020). Teachers do not have the skills to offer alternative standpoints to students about the different socio-economic and identity issues in Pakistan (Mulkeen, 2009). This is what Paulo Freire (1985) called "Banking-Education" in which textbooks and teachers promote only a single worldview. School textbooks in Pakistan do not encourage democratic values to promote civic responsibilities (Chapman, & Adams, 2002). Teachers also adopt an uncritical

approach toward the contents of the textbooks to make it easy for themselves and students are also discouraged from raising critical questions.

Moreover, militant organizations exploit religious identities. These militant organizations target youth through violent literature (Khan, Israr, & Khan, 2019; Khan & Ullah, 2018). During the Soviet-Afghan school, the curriculum was manipulated to glorify war (Shirazi, 2017; Khan, S., Khan, Z., & Ullah, R. 2018). For this purpose school curriculum was used as a tool to spread cultural and direct violence based on ethno-religious identities to promote extremism in this region.

Hence, this research article investigated the school curriculum to identify the language of peace and violence.

Theoretical Framework

This research article focuses on the contents of school curricula that promote structural violence or the interest of the powerful. We have used the "Knowledge of the Powerful" as a theory which emphasizes that curriculum is a complex body of specialist knowledge that helps in analyzing whether or to what extent a curriculum represents "powerful knowledge" (Muller, & Young, 2019). This theory was deemed suitable for this study because the powerful elites in Pakistan usually have the strongest say in designing curricula to serve their interest. Moreover, the Integrative Theory of Peace (ITP) also provides theoretical insight to this study, which emphasizes effective peace education, a unity-based worldview, a culture of healing, and peace (Danesh, 2006; Jones, 2020). These theories provide insight to analyse the powerful violent narratives in the curriculum.

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study used qualitative content analysis to extract relevant data, analyse its contents, and critically evaluate the discursive strategies employed in the textbooks. The rationale behind selecting these specific books was that these books are compulsory subjects which every student is supposed to study. In the second step, compared and discussed the extracted texts, analytical categories and themes.

Tools of Data collection

The contents of these were thoroughly studied and the words were identified that fuel direct and indirect violence. In most cases, the specific 'text' in the books was extracted along with its "context" in the books for a more accurate interpretation and analysis. Different words were identified that reinforce structural, and cultural violence to help them in the interpretation of the contents and discourse found in the textbooks. The reliability of data extraction was ensured by extracting the data in two steps. In the first step, extracted words and sentences from each of the books, labelled them, and categorized these texts into various themes.

Sampling Techniques

The purposive sampling technique was used. We purposively selected the social science and humanities books. These books are more concerned with the social, cultural, linguistic and historical narratives as compared to textbooks such as general science and mathematics. Therefore, the books of social sciences and humanities were selected for analysis in this study. Each of these books was reviewed again and again to collect every single word that is related to the current research study.

Selection Criteria

As mentioned above, we purposively selected six textbooks for the study taught at classes 9th and 10th in public schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: (1) Pakistan Studies (Social Studies) Class 9; (2) Pakistan Studies (Social Studies) Class 10; (3) English Class 9; (4) English Class 10; (5) Urdu Class 9; and (6) Urdu Class 10. Secondly, these are primarily aimed at teaching history, ethics and morality, citizenship, linguistic skills, and ideology to students.

Data Analysis

The contents of these books were thematically analyzed in light of different narratives. All the steps of thematic analysis are followed.

Findings of the Study

The study led to several findings with respect to how the textbooks directly promote violent narratives and tend to promote a particular ethno-religious ideology in the minds of the students or peaceful narratives. Some of the most important findings of this study are explained in the light of the following themes.

Portrayal of Religious Reflection and Secular Discourses

It was found in the textbooks that all the major topics and lessons are given religious colour for political interest. The end goal of this strategy is to negate pluralism. Religion is the basic part of Pakistan's national identity and throughout curricula, it is trying to establish in the mind of pupils. Explanation of things and events in the school might develop one-sided perspectives among the pupils. The 'master script' of the state is to teach the students religious nationalism. The rest of the identities are not properly reflected in the text and negate the pluralistic values important for peaceful coexistence (Lall, 2008). To promote the religious narrative among school students, the textbooks have ignored the diverse cultures that exist in Pakistan. Most importantly, school-age children are vulnerable to violent and racially discriminative vocabularies play an outstanding role in moulding their personalities and shaping their behaviour accordingly. For instance, there are various words like war, fear, killing and enemy. Positive and peaceful words develop tolerance and patience in the students while violent and intolerant words provide negative personality traits to the youngsters (Farrell, Meyer, Sullivan, & Kung, 2003). However, the excessive use of caste, race, and race promotes discriminative behaviour in the minds of the students. However, along with violent words, there are some secular and peaceful words such as freedom, humanity, human rights and peace. These words promote peace.

Depiction of Integration or Polarization in Curriculum

Otherization is another popular language found in the curricula of classes 9th and 10th. Under this strategy, the curriculum is designed in such a way that the social world is divided into "Us" and "Them", in which the "Us" is always better, superior, and primary, while the "them" is lesser, inferior, and secondary. In the school curricula, religious and ethnic minorities are presented as the most significant "others" in comparison to religious and ethnic majorities. In line with the state ideology in which India is considered to be the primary enemy of the country, the Hindus are constantly presented as a threat to Pakistan. However, it is missing in the textbooks to reflect on mutual co-existence and highlight the importance of pluralism for economic prosperity and development (Danesh, 2008; Ramsey, 2021). In most of the cases, the elements or words of integration are missing in the curriculum.

Missing words are used for integration into the curriculum leading to polarization. The things are divided into "either/or" dichotomy, for instance, things are either good or bad. For example, in the schoolbooks, ethnic and religious minority groups are always portrayed as bad. There is agreement among social scientists that things, especially ethnic, religious, and racial identities, are fluid and can be confined to sharp divisions (Harber, & Sakade, 2009; Khan, 2022). However, the excessive use of caste, race and race promotes discriminative behaviour in the minds of the students. It indicates that the children are being taught that there are two religious groups such as Muslims and Hindus. These two nations are considered opposites to each other. Moreover, the hatred history of religious nationalism is being taught to youngsters which may have negative impacts on the young minds of school-age children. Consequently, the children learn to adopt hateful behaviour against the Hindus which is disastrous to coexistence and a peaceful environment (Malik, 2002). In the curriculum, words for integration are not properly highlighted and polarization is visible.

In the school curriculum, one category is presented as "good" and the other is categorized as "bad" It promotes exclusiveness in society, where some people are deliberately excluded from the national mainstream. Given that a large number of Hindus and other religious and ethnic minorities live as peaceful and loyal citizens of this country, the negative portrayal of them negatively affects and negates multiculturalism in the country (Sudheep, 2016). It disrupts national harmony. In the textbooks, certain categories are presented as above criticism (Qazi, 2020). In other words, certain categories of people and ideas are immunized against critical scrutiny and elevated to the level of sacredness (Standish, K., & Nygren, 2018; Knudsen, 2006). It creates obstacles to the development of critical thinking among the pupils. It only allows a one-sided understanding of things and ideas (Rosser, 2003). Moreover, words from the selected book such as sectarian war, civil war, and conflict and disputes reflected in-group and out-group conflict.

Instead of creating unity among the various ethnic, religious, and political groups, the school curricula further polarize them into opposite camps in both India and Pakistan (Lall, 2008; Munir, 2015). Polarization set a stage for violence and conflict which can be seen in the different parts of Pakistan (Afzal, 2018). It exemplifies the hostile approach and master script of the textbook which is designed to spread and glorify war and also disseminate the hostile relation of Pakistan and India. For instance, for example in selected Pak-study books word 'Hindu' 47 times and non-Muslim 8 times are used. This reflection of these words reinforced polarization in the minds of students. It is a well-known fact that most of the social world is created by people themselves. However, the curricula always try to hide the process of social construction by making things appear natural and essential (Apple, 1971). Different ethnic and religious minorities are as naturally against Pakistan. Although this perception is socially constructed it is not natural that minorities will be against Pakistan.

Glorification of Violence and Peace in Textbooks

Certain things and features are glorified in the textbooks and these appear again and again in the textbooks. For example, the 1965 war between India and Pakistan is glorified in it is shown that the Pakistan Army successfully defended Pakistan against the aggression of India. Similarly, the armed forces of the country have gloried times and again in the textbooks in various direct and indirect ways. Differences within the country among various groups based on religion, ethnicity, and politics are minimized. The country is presented as a unified system where things are working in a perfectly harmonious way. In other words, certain historical and cultural realities are omitted from the textbooks or their mention is kept to the minimum (Apple, & Christian-Smith, 2017). The text indicates that the word war is justified that Hindustan got independence because of the war of independence, while the political and peaceful movements of independence are ignored. Consequently, school-age children learn to become violent and intolerant of the Hindus and India, because the master script of the textbooks promotes violence and antagonism among the youngsters in schools. The political differences between Muslims and Hindus are traced back to different historical events such as the Hindi and Urdu controversy of 1867 and partition of Bengal in 1905 and Hindu and Muslim violent acts in different places. It promotes violence and peace and peaceful co-existing is missing from the text. However, in some places, the importance of peace is also highlighted in the textbook.

Limitation of the Study

This research study suffers from certain limitations such as theoretical limitations, methodological shortcomings, time management, and financial barriers. It was difficult to cover all the books of the 9th and 10th classes. Further, this research is delimited to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, province of Pakistan. Therefore, despite certain criticism this study is confined to textbooks social sciences and humanities textbooks of 9th and 10th class. I could not manage the expenditure for this study because the available resources were not enough.

Conclusion

The textbooks analyzed in this study touch on a variety of themes. Each book is designed to achieve certain primary, manifest, and latent functions. However, along with the manifest, many latent functions indirectly serve the interest of the elite. Patriotism in itself is a virtue and every state must endeavor to instill the spirit of sacrifice and loyalty to one's nation. However, the specific form of patriotism being preached can create an issue for the nation and the world at large. The school curriculum only serves the interest of the elite and creates polarization rather than unity among the different ethnic groups. The textbook of Pakistan does not fulfil the basic criteria of peace education. The prerequisites of peace education such as unity, a culture of healing, and peace are largely missing from the textbooks. Peace education continuously trains a new generation on divisive issues of in- group/out- group differentiations. However, along with violent words, in the selected books peaceful words are also used in the different contexts. These words inculcate civic sense and encourage national harmony and integration in Pakistan. To counter the violent narrative it is important to bring reforms in the education curriculum of Pakistan.

Recommendations

In the light of this comprehensive study, the following recommendations are given below;

- a) It is suggested to reform the school curriculum to promote peace and harmony in Pakistan.
- b) Education has vital effects on all aspects of the state and human society. Acceptance of diversity is important for the global community. For this purpose, diversity should be promoted in education reforms.
- c) Critical thinking is lacking in the existing school curriculum. The new contents should be included in the school curriculum to promote and encourage critical thinking among the students. Today children are living in a complex world. Without critical thinking, they cannot understand the different aspects of this complex world.
- d) Moreover, the literature should be included in the school curriculum to understand the problems and complexities of the modern world. Especially, the children should be educated at in early age about climate change, sustainability and development.
- e) In the school curriculum, equal representation should be given to all ethnic groups in the school curriculum in Pakistan.

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