

Religious Education: Teachers' Perspective on Girls

Samreen Mehmood* Abdul Ghaffar† Amir Zaman‡



Abstract *This paper identifies and investigates the general perceptions of public sector teachers of both urban and rural localities regarding girl's religious education. This research also explores the reasons for those perceptions through understanding the personal experiences of teachers with girls who were going to get religious education. To get the deep insight of the phenomena ethnographic method of research was used. In depth interviews were conducted with urban teachers group and rural teachers group. Five steps thematic analysis was conducted to find out the results.*

Key Words:

Madrasah
education,
Religious
schools,
Ethnography

Introduction

In the field of education, it is common practice to send children to specific religious education centers commonly run by some private group of people who were certified in the field of religious education. In small towns the situation was even more wretched as a single person was responsible for all types of religious activities in the village and mostly nobody was asking him (always a male member of the community) for the authenticity of his acts and deeds he made in context of religion. Commonly it is observed since long that villages are having this one person the imam masjid who is responsible for all sort of religious activities in the village from daily prayer to the funeral or marriage registration.

Situation of religious education for young girls was the most awful as the villages had only few ladies who knew how to read the holy book in Arabic, their focus was only the reading of Arabic description, not knowing about the true message of the Holy Book (Quran). For the last three decades it is a clear trend of establishing madrasa for both boys and girls equally in urban and rural areas of the country. Thousands of madrasas are established registered and none registered. On the other hand, enrollment of students in madrasas is increasing day by day which portray that it is certainly an inclination among the parents to send out their children to the madrasas. Parents with different intellectual and

*PhD Scholar (Education), Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Mardan, KP, Pakistan. Email: samreen@awkum.edu.pk

†Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

‡Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

financial background equally show more inclination to send out their girls to the madrasa due to a social tradition, as since long it was a feeling prevailing among the members of the society that for young girls the most suitable place of education are Madaris and the most suitable form of education is religious education. Parents with an education oriented background willingly send their girls to the formal education institutions to get prepared for the challenges in all fields of life. Besides the formal education the educated parents however to educate their kids on religious lines too, keeping the old traditions breathing. Uphold the practice of getting religious education from the specialized institution for religious studies is a matter of satisfaction and honor for them. Regard less of what nature of education they are gathering from these institutions. Parents fully trust, what the madrasa teacher teaches to their kids.

Research Questions

1. What are the common perceptions of female teachers regarding young girl's education in a religious institution?
2. What are the common observations of teaching community about girls who study in religious institutions?
3. What are the personal experiences regarding female religious education?

Suitability of Ethnographic Approach

This study was conducted to get insight about the strengths and weaknesses of a religious institutions and religious education. As ethnography is the study of a group of people who are sharing the same cultural values so this was the best choice to conduct an ethnographic study. "Ethnographic researchers look for shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that the culture-sharing group adopts over time" (Creswell 2012). It is common social interaction to have a shared ethnographic pattern that stabilizes as tacit rules and expectations of the group (Spindler & Spindler, 1992). As ethnography deals with the patterns of society with certain behaviors, beliefs and languages so it was the better choice to conduct this study with the ethnographic design, because in this study a common belief of people who were sharing the same cultural setting was studied. These shared patterns raise several practical questions that ethnographers need to address in a study (Creswell 2012).

Method of Data Collection

Focus groups were made and a series of focus group interviews were conducted from the key informants in three different localities. Focus group interviews were the best idea to collect data as the key informers were directly related to the

phenomena under, assessment techniques are available for gathering data quickly from a group that may be shared for a short period of time Le Compte & Schensul (1999). To get the finest picture of the under-study phenomena and to fully know the pattern of the cultural group researchers spend time with the groups in the field and so the data was collected in emic data form. Ethnographers collect data through spending time at participants' sites where they live, work, or play, (Creswell 2012).

Data Collection

Open-ended interview questions were in separate sittings and group discussions conducted in the presence of researchers all responses recorded textual and audio form. Textual data was recorded and analyzed by the researchers. Analyzing the data for a description of both the individuals and sites of the culture-sharing group; analyzing patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language; and reaching some conclusions about the meaning learned from studying the people and the site (Wolcott, 1994).

Results of Interviews

Themes were selected from the textual and recorded data, as in ethnography researcher gather data in bulk and then five step data analysis conducted to gather the themes from the data. We will consider a series of steps that represents a general template rather than a definitive procedure for conducting ethnography, Creswell (2012). During this process some new striking unexpected themes emerged. The first overall impression after giving a first reading to the textual data and hearing the audio of three groups discussion the idea emerges that the local teachers want to discuss the teaching methods of the religious schools and their impact on the lives of the young female students. This process was comprising on timed repeated readings, extracted themes to get the full insight of the understudy phenomena.

The question was asked from the participants who were demographically living in urban area and all ladies were educated and were from same profession of teaching. With different academic areas and same professional education as all the 12 participants were sharing the same cultural setting and were having the same professional background and the same professional training. As the study was focusing on the perceptions and practices of female teaching community about sending their young girls to the institutes of religious education and what are their overall perception and observation about girls who are earning religious education specifically in the formal setting of religious education in the specified institutes for the said type of education.

Social, educational, political and economic aspects were the main focus of study so as the questions asked by the researchers in the field during the group discussion.

Religious education for girls in an institutional setting is a good idea but.....

Social Aspect of Female Religious Education

(Group A) Urban area Teachers

All participants in the group discussion responded in favor of religious education as whole but with various slight differences in views and individual experiences. A typical response was “religious education supports positively in lives of humans... it teaches humanity and the innate teaching of Prophets.... And will lead to the true destination *Jannah*...” At the same time responders felt that “religious education only emphasis the religious aspect of education and the contemporary knowledge”

...girls who are going to madrasa are never very friendly to those who take education in formal institution as they feel that formal education is not an excellent choice for girls....

...many men opt for madrasa educated girls to become their life partner as they feel that those girls are very pure *Deen Dar* (devoted to religion) and will serve as best mothers in future...

(Group B) Rural area Teachers

This group teachers were strongly in favor of religious education

...in rural areas it's a general trend that girls need no education and for a girl it's important to be skillful in house hold chore mostly conservative people consider it as a shame to send their girls to schools or even send for madrasa...

A school teacher who was not happy with madrasa education added that,

.... girls who go to madrasa are very proud of their knowledge of Islam even they not like to talk to those who go to schools as they believe that school education is basically a worldly education and will never benefit them in this world and after death....

...religious education makes life difficult for girls after joining madrasa, girls feel that all cultural things are none Islamic like observing *Sharai Parda* (Islamic rules of covering faces for adult women from all those men who are not fall under blood relation rules) which is not possible in the traditional joint family system....

Political Aspect of Female Religious Education

(Group B: Urban Teachers Group)

The most strong example given by the local teacher while advocating the political role of Madaris for girls education was Jmiya Hafsa adjacent to Lal masjid in July 2007 ... female students came out in protest against the certain policies of government, which had destabilized the government of that time, the female students blocked the roads of the capital city Islamabad for a political cause and every one witnessed that female students were holding baton and snatching the badges of officers and tearing the shirts of Islamabad policemen which is totally unacceptable in local social setup no one was expecting such a harsh behavior from girls specially from those who were associated with religious institution.

Majority of the respondents were of the view that, Madaris possess very strong point of view on certain issues related to Government policies "Mostly Madaris do not allow freedom of thought and freedom of speech on many issues like polio vaccination and Jihad"

(Group A: Rural Teachers)

...girls have nothing to do with politics in our locality as we only send girls to learn Quran and Hadith and we never want girls to participate in politics..
...we don't know about the fact that whether they teach girls anything about politics or not but during elections we noticed that teachers are forcing them to vote only for those political parties which have pure Islamic agendas or slogans.

Educational Aspect of Female Religious Education

(Group B: Teachers from Urban Areas)

.....We never see the scientists, philosophers and professional experts as miscreants in the society this is the best proof in the fever of formal education and establishing the peaceful society is the true spirit of Islam.

.....Islam teaches us the basic philosophy of social life, it shows us the path to explore in the universe for the benefit of mankind means Quran itself debates on the importance of seeking knowledge and creating new things for progress and peace full growth of humanity. So Islam promotes science and technology and all progressive fields for research and creation of new better world for mankind and not only for mankind but for all creatures.

(Group A: Rural Teachers)

Referencing educational aspect of madrasa education participants added that going for only madrasa education is not a very practical idea as we all know that only getting religious education will not help the future of the nation as we need professional experts for the normal life affairs. One participant added that “Muhammad the prophet of Allah describe himself as a teacher” she added that “the very first religious education institution was established within the premises of Masjid e Nabvi (PBUH) and this was the practice of His friends to sit together and to teach religious as well as contemporary knowledge” moreover it was added that “Allah commanded all human being to search in the universe for the wellbeing of the humanity and for all creations of this universe”. If following these worse then we must go for the contemporary education for sciences for research in medicine for discovering the best of the universe to benefit the human being and for social education to build a peace full society.

On the other hand there are certain religious scholars feel threaten with emerging knowledge. It is the foremost responsibility of religious scholars to extend the message of peace and tolerance, which is the real essence of Islam referring to tolerance it, was added that tolerance for all religious and social believes all sects within the same religion and tolerance for all humans for their choices of way of life.

...by doing so it will help promotion of religious education and build an environment of trust for religious institutions... added by a participant. In the support of formal education participant added that formal education also provides basic religious education and *Deenyat* (subject on basics of religion) is being taught from the beginning of schooling to the graduation level.

Economic Aspect of Female Religious Education

(Group B: Teachers from Urban Area)

...we feel respect for those who study in a religious school but still we never bother ourselves to promote financial support for those who are getting this type of education....

....our religious scholars are always very poor financially that is the reason, parents who are from progressive families never go only for a religious schooling for their girls as they this harsh reality that a religious teacher will get nothing from the society for her services ...

(Group A: Teachers from Rural Areas)

Religious schools producing religious scholars. This large number of girls getting religious education certificates and then go to the educational market to search job for themselves which must be according to their own social and academic choice

...girls with religious school certificate have to face many challenges as there is no such proper arrangement for any jobs for religious school certifies students. They have to serve as **Usaateza** (a female Quran Teacher) teaching Quran at home to nearby kids and this service is volunteer only they get from the parents of those Quran learning kids are a pair of shoes and clothes to wear.

Findings of the Study

After concisely illustrating the basic concepts of young girls religious education and the perceptions of public teachers towards their religious education within an environment of Madrasa it was disused that what are the real life practices of teaching community towards their own children specially young girls among all. In choosing regular religious education for young girls within the environment of religious institute suggest as a better option with different compulsions for building up a more educated and peaceful society.

Regarding the social aspect of female religious education, majority of the Urban teachers were in favor of religious education with minor differences, the urban teachers responded that, religious education brings positive changes in human life, because it teaches humanity, on the other hand this is also a fact that girls educated from madrassa are not friendly as compared to the girls who are educated from modern education system, however men are opted for girls of madrassa education due to their devotion to family life.

The responses of the Rural area teachers was quite different from that of the Urban teachers, the people from the rural area prefers the girls to be skillful in households activities instead of education, one of the teacher identified that girls qualified from madrassa are too much proud of their religious education, dislike conversation with girls who are qualified from modern education system, furthermore religious education makes life complicated and conservative.

Regarding the political aspect of female religious education the responses of the urban area teachers was in positive and pointed out that yes these students are having active role in politics and also used for political purpose, its best example is the students of Jamiya Hafsa, who in July 2007 protested against the government policies and hijacked the capital city of Pakistan for several days.

The response of the Rural area teachers regarding the role of madrassa students in politics were in negative, they pointed out that we sends our children only for education, we don't permit girls involvement in politics, however at the

time of election we notice that their teachers are forced them to vote in favor of the religious groups.

Similarly on educational aspect of female religious education, political as there is differences of opinion regarding the political affiliation of these religious institutions, Participants believed that religious education can serve as force behind crafting a certain mined set regarding politics as all Madaris are following some certain political school of thought and will serve towards some special cause in the long run for the very purpose thy focusing the female Madaris as training the future mothers for some special cause is a more reliable and fruitful investment. Other responses were quit opposite of this view point as a number of participants believed that in local social setup girls and female are not very much participating in politics or rather they are not the one in the family who are deciding their family political compassions.

References

- Andrew, B.M. Maggie, A.B., McDaid & Hugh, P. (2011). Promoting community cohesion in England, *School Leadership & Management*, 31:3, 281-296, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2010.545382
- Brian L. Heuser (2005) The Ethics of Social Cohesion, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80:4, 8-15, DOI: 10.1207/S15327930pje8004_2
- Creswell Johan. W. Educational Research planning conducting and evaluation quantitative and qualitative research fourth Edition *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*
- Ellie Vasta (2013) Do We Need Social Cohesion in the 21st Century? Multiple Languages of Belonging in the Metropolis, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 34:2, 196-213, DOI: 10.1080/07256868.2013.781983
- Giuditta Fontana (2015): Religious education after conflicts: promoting social cohesion or entrenching existing cleavages?, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2015.1099422
- Hans Schmeets & Saskia te Riele Paper presented at the International Conference on Social Cohesion and Development Paris, 20 January 2010
- Marshall, Catherine, & Rossman, Gretchen B. (1995). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Steve Derné All Religions Merge in Tranquebar: Religious Coexistence and Social Cohesion in South India, *Asian Anthropology* ISSN: 1683-478X (Print) 2168-4227 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raan20>
- Th. Jansen, N. Chioncel & H. Dekkers (2006) Social cohesion and integration: learning active citizenship, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27:02, 189-205, DOI: 10.1080/01425690600556305
- Yunis Alam & Charles Husband (2013) Islamophobia, community cohesion and counter-terrorism policies in Britain, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 47:3, 235-252, DOI: 10.1080/0031322X.2013.797779