Impacts of Sectarian Culture on the Teaching and Learning Practices at the Tertiary Level: A Case Study of a Public Sector University

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Abstract

Few studies focus on the impact of sectarian culture on educational processes at the tertiary level has emerged from Pakistan**.** Although limited to a certain geographical location, prevalence of sectarian culture is a new dimension that is affecting the quality of education at the tertiary level in Pakistan. The authors of this study examined the impacts of sectarian tendencies on the teaching and learning processes of a public sector university. They used the case study method to generate data through the application of interviews, document reviews, and observations. Regardless of their affiliations with a particular sect, all the participants of this study had consensus that the said phenomenon has negative implications on the overall academic environment of the university and measures should be taken to eradicate the said tendencies from the university. It is suggested that through education a cultural norm needs to be evolved, which values the religious diversity as an asset and not as a burden for society.

Keywords: Higher education, Sectarian influence, Teaching and learning, Qualitative Research

Introduction:

The diversity of Pakistani society is a mosaic composed of its multi ethno-linguistic and multi-religious flavor. It has been acknowledged that the richness of diversity can provide opportunities for experience and offer an enormous volume of knowledge about various customs, traditions, and cultures and, as the literature points out, experience can be used as a tool to bring harmony in society. Evidence from the developed countries suggests that diversity is entertained as a source of learning from people of different backgrounds; therefore, their educational systems are very explicit regarding the benefits of multiculturalism.[1] For instance, in European countries particular guidelines for educators of primary and secondary level have been developed to counter intolerance and discrimination against the Muslim population.[2] However, such efforts are in the infancy stage of development in Pakistan, where educational interventions are still wrestling with the issues of infrastructure development and enrollment. Studies conducted to examine the role of education in creating awareness about diversity noted that both the teaching practices and curricula are equally responsible for the suffering of

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[1] State of Victoria. "Unity through Diversity. The Victorian Government's vision for civics, citizenship and multicultural education, 2010 ." url: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/cultures/unitydiversity.pdf.
[2] OSCE. "Role of education in promoting respect for diversity highlighted at Paris meeting, 2012." url: https://www.osce.org/odihr/96891

non-Muslims and religious minorities in Pakistan.[3] The teaching practices in Pakistani classrooms have a limited role in addressing the diverse cultural needs of students. "Unfortunately, the scenario of Pakistani classrooms, in particular, the civics education classroom does not meet the diverse cultural needs of the students. Thus, there is a serious mismatch between the outcomes of curriculum and … implementation of teaching and learning experiences."[4]

Therefore, it seems that the students are not properly equipped with the skills and competencies to motivate them to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge that is available in the shape of diversity. Subsequently, the observation vindicates that "the cultures of various communities differ so much that they may be more alien to each other than to foreign ones."[5] Not only has the importance of school education been regarded as an important element of social cohesion, but it has also been acknowledged that there is a substantial connection between tertiary education and governance indicators such as ethnic tension, corruption, and rule of law.[6] To use university education as a tool for addressing the previously mentioned governance indicators, the government of Pakistan initiated higher education reforms in 2001, yet there are a number of issues that neutralize the reform initiatives, which ultimately affects the learning of students. Issues such as gaps in curricula and the instructional, professional, and organizational skills of the university faculty have been largely attributed to the limited competencies of the university graduates.[7]

The present study was conducted in order to explore a new dimension – sectarianism – and its effects on teaching and learning at the tertiary level. The study examined the impacts of sectarian tension on the educational processes of a public sector university by exclusively focusing on the following: 1. how sectarian tendencies are practiced at the university level; 2. the impact of the said phenomenon on the overall academic climate of the university; and 3. the perception of different stakeholders on this situation.

Literature Review:

There is a scarcity of research contributions in terms of addressing the issues of sectarianism and its negative impact on academia (in Pakistani context). Therefore, the literature integrated in this section provides seminal information about the said phenomenon by drawing related examples from different parts of the world. For the last couple of decades, Pakistan has been a victim of various kinds of violence and aggression, which led to huge losses of innocent lives (Raja, 2013). Schools children

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[3] SDPI. *The relationship between education and religious discrimination in Pakistan-analysis of curriculum and pedagogy in Pakistani schools.* Islamabad: SDPI, 2011.

[4] K. Malik. *Promoting the "notion of cultural diversity" in grade XII students in a government college Sukkur, Sindh* . Unpublished master's Thesis (Karachi: Aga Khan University, 2013), p.12

[5] Nation. *Multilingual, multicultural, Nation, 2009.* http://nation.com.pk/letters/04-Apr-2009/Multilingual-multicultural.

[6] E. Bloom, M. Hartley, and H. Rosovsky. "Beyond Private Gain: The Public Benefits of Higher Education." In *International Handbook of Higher Education.*, by James J. F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach (eds), (The Netherlands: Kluwer Press, 2006), pp.293-308

[7] S. A. Raza and S. A. Naqvi. "Quality of Pakistani University Graduates as Perceived by Employers: Implications for Faculty Development." *Journal of Quality and Technology Management* 7:1 (2011), pp.57-67; S. A. Raza, Z. Majid, and A. Zia. " Perceptions of Pakistani University Students about Roles of Academics Engaged in Imparting Development Skills: Implications for Faculty Development ." *Bulletin of Education & Research* 32 :2, 2010, pp.75-91

have been targeted; girls' schools have been blown up, university academicians have been kidnapped, and places of worship have been attacked. Likewise, in recent years, Pakistan has witnessed a worrying escalation of sectarian tensions which is the result of "…. rising conflict in the Middle East [which] has strengthened the sectarian political narrative in Pakistan and emboldened militant networks on both sides of the divide, with local tendencies proving highly responsive to international events."[8]

Historiography of sectarianism in Muslim societies has internalized a "theological construction of conflict" within existed local social differences.[9] The addition of theological differences allowed centuries old ideational cleavage of Muslim societies based on contesting interpretations and valuations of historical epochs, incidents and cultural differences to the local conflicts.[10] While tracing the history of sectarian tensions in Pakistan, Hunzai mentioned that the escalation of sectarian tensions in Pakistan was the result of certain geo-political circumstances, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in which religion was used as an instrument of policy.[11] He further added that the competition for power and influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia gave a sharp rise to sectarian tensions in Pakistan. Moreover, Yousaf reported that Pakistan's involvement in the global war on terrorism also has a role in current waves of violence in Pakistan, "Sectarian violence is arguably the most dangerous fallout for Pakistan of the U.S.-led war against terrorism in neighboring Afghanistan."[12] However, it is commonly observed that at various occasions the sectarian conflicts have also been used to destabilize the governments in Pakistan.[13]

Pakistan has suffered greatly due to the lack of social cohesion. The issue of non-cohesiveness is due to the undermining of the diversity of opinion, belief, and existence. In general, it is noted that diversity is a source of strength, but unfortunately Pakistan is divided along ethnic, racial, and sectarian lines, which constantly weaken its statehood. People are persecuted for their affiliation with minority sects and religious beliefs. According to the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), sectarian violence caused the death of 687 people in 2013, which was a 22 percent increase in the number of sectarian causalities reported in 2012.[14] The PIPS report predicted that trends of sectarian and racial violence will continue at a high ratio. From January to March 2014, 70 people were killed and 92 were injured in 26 sectarian related incidents reported by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP). One of the reasons for the chaotic situation is the internal

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[8] CRG. "Rising ssectarianism and the promotion of tolerance in Pakistan", 2017. http://www.religionandgeopolitics.org/pakistan/rising-sectarianism-and-promotion-tolerance-pakistan.

[9] Tor H. Aase. "The Theological Construction of Conflict: Gilgit, Northern Pakistan." In *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, by Leif Manger (ed), (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), p.61

[10] Akbar S. Ahmed. *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World.* (New York: .B. Tauris, 2001), p.44

[11] Izhar Hunzai. *Conflict dynamics in Gilgit-Baltistan.* United States Institute of Peace, 321 (2013).

[12] Huma Yusuf. *Sectarian violence: Pakistan's greatest security threat?.* NOREF (Norwegian: Peace Building Resource Centre, 2010), p.1

[13] Frederic Grare. "The evolution of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan and the ever-changing face of violence." *Journal of South Asian Studies* 30 :1 (2007), pp.127-143

[14] Zahoor Khan Marwat. *"Challenges Not Insurmountable," The News.* Pakistan: The News, March 2014.

displacement of people due to military operations and the fight against militants. In 2009 alone, 3 million people were internally displaced due to military operation and fight with TTP. Large numbers of displaced groups moved to larger cities, with the change in demographic settings creating further tensions in various parts of country.

Researchers have pointed out that the prevalence of any kind of conflict in any society is a deliberate attempt for control.[15] It has been argued that in the contemporary world conflicts are not the result of poverty or under development; instead, they are an attempt by regional, international, or local players to, through different strategies, gain control of power.[16] And sometimes in ethnic conflicts, the factor of fear is manipulated by targeting civilians in order to achieve the ultimate aim of control.[17] There is a consensus among researchers that on the eve of conflict, both the institutions of religion and of culture can be easily used to nurture shared identity and to confront other groups.[18] Sectarianism is one of the manifestations of using religion as a strategy to confront other groups. Sectarian conflicts are considered one of the worst forms of conflict; as Druckman and Zechmeister pointed out, in this kind of conflict individuals who considered themselves as representative of a particular groups are more likely to act harmfully and brutally as compared to the individuals who are fighting for personal gains.[19]

Evidence suggests that whatever the reasons, sectarian strife caused irreparable damages to the social fabric of society, whether the said phenomenon existed in Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon or elsewhere. Shah (2014) reported that not only did the sectarian tensions threaten to divide Pakistani society on the basis of religious prejudice, but also affected the economic, political, and diplomatic affairs of Pakistan. He further added that one of the implications of this situation is that since different sects are engaged in aggression "…the anti-Islamic elements have entered the ranks of sectarian organizations and start killing the moderate, neutral and enlightened leadership of the Muslims."[20] Yousaf (2012) stated that between 2007 and 2011 a total of 631 sectarian incidents occurred in Pakistan resulting in the deaths of 1170 people.[21]

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[15] M. Thompson. "Women, gender, and conflict: making the connections." *Development in Practice* 16 :3 (2006), pp.342-353; K. D. Bush and D. Saltarelli. "The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peace-building education for Children." (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000). http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/insight4.pdf.

[16] M. Thompson. "Women, gender, and conflict: making the connections."

[17] K. D. Bush and D. Saltarelli. "The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peace-building education for Children."

[18] M. Thompson. "Women, gender, and conflict: making the connections"; C. Cockburn. *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict.* (London: Zed Books, 1998), L. Paanakker. *Higher education in Iraq under attack. .* Unpublished master's Thesis, (Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam, 2009).

[19] D. Druckman and K. Zechmeister. "Conflict of interest and value: propositions in the sociology of conflict. ." *Human Relations* 26 (1993), pp.449-466

[20] Mohammad Nadeem Shah. "Evolution of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Threat to State and Society." *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 29 :2 (2014), pp.441-459, p.455

[21] Huma Yusuf. *Sectarian violence: Pakistan's greatest security threat?*

Sectarian diversity is not peculiar to only Pakistan; there are number of countries where such a phenomenon exists with varying degrees of influence on different professions. More (2015) mentioned that religious association and beliefs can affect public policies in law, health care, welfare, criminal justice, immigration, and education.[22] Sherkat (2007) mentioned that in America, "Sectarian and fundamentalist Christians often come to college with little or no preparation for understanding or tolerating ideas which confront their beliefs, or interacting with people who do not share their opinions… in large state universities—where most sectarian and fundamentalist Christians attend college---these young devotees are often confronted with diversity for the first time in their lives."[23] However, studies conducted in some of the western countries show that students who are affiliated with any kind of religious groups are doing well with their academic programs (Mooney, 2005). Cordesman (2006) and Jawad (2007) stated that since the beginning of the crisis in Iraq, the higher education system of Iraq came to be organized on sectarian's lines that caused many challenges to academia.[24] "Academics appear to be particularly vulnerable in the newly created context of political violence against them and the higher education sector as a whole.[25] The country has witnessed a sharp increase of killings, abductions, an exodus of intellectuals, and death threats.[26]

Although education is considered as a panacea to minimize the negative tendencies of individuals in any society, literature also suggests that education can intensify violence and conflict.[27] Therefore, Banks and Banks has been suggested that "teachers can help reduce prejudice and discrimination against various religious, racial, and ethnic groups by including positive content about all groups and their contributions to human civilization."[28] In Pakistan, the education systems have a questionable role in developing policies that support religious and cultural diversity. Therefore, concerted efforts are required to review the curriculum and to be explicit in educating the teaching force on how to tackle the issues of diversity and multiculturalism in Pakistani society. Smith (2007) asserted that timely interventions and policy making may greatly diffuse tensions: "There are benefits to analyzing the role of education before, during and after conflicts. For example, within relatively peaceful contexts an analysis of the education

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[22] J. More. "The Sunni and Shia Schism: Religion, Islamic Politics, and Why Americans Need to Know the Differences." *The Social Studies* 106 :5 (2015), pp.226-235

[23] Darren Sherkat. "Religion and higher education: The Good, the bad, and the ugly", 2007.

[24] A. H. Cordesman. *Iraq's sectarian and ethnic violence and the evolving insurgency,* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006); A. S. Jawad. "Violence against ideas in Iraq: Peace Review." *A Journal of Social Justice* 19 (2007), pp.521-524

[25] B. O'Malley. *Education under attack.* Paris: UNESCO. O'Malley, B. (2007). Education under attack. (Paris: UNESCO, 2007), p.8. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/education/attack/; L. Paanakker. *Higher education in Iraq under attack.*

[26] I. Harb. *Higher education and the Future of Iraq.* United States Institute of Peace, 195 (2008). http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr195.pdf.

[27] A. Smith. *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. The influence of education on conflict and peace building.* UNESCO, 2010; L. Davies. "Schools and war: urgent agendas for comparative and international education." *A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 34:4 (2005), pp.357- 371; K. D. Bush and D. Saltarelli. "The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peace-building education for Children."

[28] L. Moore. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to Teaching About Religion in Secondary School.* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

system may highlight aspects of education that could become sources of grievance between groups or between the state and sections of society and this provides an opportunity to adjust education policies and programs in a preventative way."[29]

Methodology:

Due to the nature and sensitivity of the topics, even some of the basic information has been intentionally kept confidential. The aim of this study was to examine the impacts of sectarian culture on teaching and learning practices at the tertiary level. Because very limited research focusing on the impact of sectarian culture in university education has emerged from Pakistan, the study used the case study methods to generate data. As Ogawa and Malen (1991) stated, "When the topic of interest has not been the subject of extensive empirical examination, an exploratory case study is a sound and sensible first step."[30] Likewise, Patton (1980) stated that the case study approach helps the researchers to produce a highly readable narrative that can be used by decision makers and information users.[31] The case study university is located in a geographical location, which has experienced sectarian strife for the past 15 years. The university faculty comes from three major sects: Shia, Sunni, and Ismaili. Through an opportunity sampling strategy, a total of nine faculty members, three from each sect, were selected for this study. Moreover, three staff from the management cadre representing three sects were also the participants of this research. Besides informal chats, observations, and document reviews, formal interviews were tools that used for data collection. The interviews were conducted in locations where the participants felt comfortable, for instance, in their offices. The length of each interview was 30-40 minutes. Since the participants were not comfortable with recording the interviews, note taking was used as a tool for maintaining conversation records. This data recording method helped in developing thematic areas to categorize the fundamental steps to analyze the data as qualitative studies. Due to the nature and sensitivity of the topics, even some of the basic information has been intentionally kept confidential. Furthermore, measures have been taken to maintain the privacy of the research participants; instead of using their actual names and designations, the study only used faculty and management staff for the participants. Since qualitative approach allows the researchers to analyze the data continuously (Mertens, 2005), the data analysis carried out with the inception of this study. In this regard, themes and categories relevant to the objectives of the study were developed to analyze the data.[32]

Major Findings:

Regardless of their affiliations with a particular sect, all the participants of this study had consensus on three points: firstly, in one way or another sectarian tendencies and behaviors are demonstrated in the daily affairs of the university; secondly, the said phenomenon has very negative implications on the overall academic environment of the university and upon the students' learning; and thirdly, measures should be taken to

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[29] A. Smith. *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. The influence of education on conflict and peace building, p.2.*

[30] R. T. Ogawa and B. Malen. " Towards rigor in review of multivocal literatures. Applying the exploratory case study method." *Review of Educational Research* 61 :3 (1991), 265-286, p.271

[31] M. Q. Patton. *Qualitative evaluation methods, (*Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), p.305

[32] M. A. Constas. "Qualitative analysis as a public event: The documentation of category development procedures." *American Educational Research Association.* 29 :2 (1992), pp.253-266

eradicate the said tendencies from the university. Both the faculty and management staff pointed out that there are multiple reasons for the prevalence of such dangerous trends in an institution of higher education. Some of the faculty member argued that the religio-political climate of the region influenced the university stakeholders to demonstrate sectarian-oriented policies and tendencies. As one of the management staff stated, "We have this misassumption and fear that if we are disconnected from our sects we would not be able to cope with the system; therefore, we need strong bonds with our respective sects because it has become a need for success and progress".

However, some faculty contested the argument that the religio-political climate of the region is responsible for the said affairs, in an institution where highly educated people are taking care of academic activities as one of the faculty commented on this situation: "Lets accept the argument that the overall climate of the region is responsible…what is the role of highly educated people equipped with MPhil, MA and PhD degrees in neutralizing these practices". The participants of the study admitted that from the teaching and learning processes, to the hiring of faculty/management staff and the award of the contract, one could easily notice glimpses of sectarian factors. They admitted that they cannot blame a particular sect as more involved than another in such behavior; as one of the faculty commented, "Regardless of our affiliation with a particular sect, we all are involved in extending favors to our respective communities… this is very unfortunate that we wear the lenses of sectarianism while addressing the daily business of our institution". Another faculty reflected on this situation, "A small tree of sectarianism was planted few years back which has now become a strong and healthy tree and it has very deep roots…lots of sincere efforts are required to eliminate this hazard…being highly educated we need to act vigilantly and responsibly".

There was consensus among the faculty and management staff that the gaps in the past recruitment policies, which were very explicit in considering the sectarian factor, were also responsible for the said phenomenon. One of the faculty stated the following: "Our recruitment policies were sectarian-oriented in the past… rather than considering the competencies of the candidates their sectarian affiliation was more important for the university…I think the university had no options except following the said pattern of recruitment because the whole area was under the influence of sectarian strife". Faculty also added that the said pattern was not only applicable for the hiring of faculty, but also for the hiring of drivers, gardeners, clerical workers, and other staff. One of the faculty commented on this situation, "What can you expect when you hire people on sectarian basis rather than on competency basis…under these circumstances demonstrating sectarian tendencies is normal I think". When the participants were asked if they have evidence that sectarian factors were used to offer employment, they replied that although nothing was in black and white, one can easily notice such patterns.

It was noted that whether it was a scrutiny of applications for academic and non-academic position, or addressing the disciplinary matters of students and faculty, it was ensured that equal representation of the three sects [as a tacit policy] should be taken care of in the composition/constitution of the various committees, such as the scrutiny committee, disciplinary committee, proctor committee, etc. On one occasion, when one of the researchers was in a meeting with the Vice Chancellor, a senior faculty member requested the Vice Chancellor revisit/review the names of the members who were on the committee that was constituted to oversee the hiring processes of visiting faculty. The senior faculty member further informed the Vice Chancellor that since an equal

representation of all three sects was not present in said committee that could compromise the transparency of the process and the people would raise their voices against the committee. When the senior faculty member left, the Vice Chancellor, who was not a native of the region, commented that, "Before assuming the leadership position of the university, I never felt or sensed that I am Sunni, Shia or Ismaili, but serving as a Vice Chancellor of this university has given me this awareness which is very unfortunate."

Some of the participants reported that, as a result of the earlier discussed circumstances, some faculty members even went to the extent of extending favors to the students affiliated with their sects by giving extra marks in the final/mid-term exams and assignments. However, the participants did not produce any tangible evidence to support their claims that faculty extended favors to the students of their respective sects; nonetheless, they had multiple narratives in this regard. One of the faculty members mentioned that, "I often notice students pick their research supervisors based on those faculty who belong to their sects with the anticipation that the affiliation might help them to get good grades". He further added: "Some time students come to me with this complains that X faculty taking care of students of their own sect; why don't you take care of us. I ask them do you have evidence which they sometime justified by giving valid arguments". Another faculty member reported, "One of my smart students, who always scored good grades in different semester, approached me with this complaint that I have this feeling that I am being given less marks to provide opportunity to another students to get the first position in the class".

There was unanimity among the faculty that students are taking full advantage of this situation, as one of the faculty stated, "Unfortunately, this menace has so many implications on the overall academic process of the university…when a student of a particular sect do not get good grades he/she blames the instructors with this allegation that since he/she was from the opposite sect, the instructor did not give him/her good grades". The faculty suggested that in order to control the said practices, the university should devise a mechanism of cross checking marked papers and research projects. In order to avoid any kind of confrontations with the students or get blamed for being biased, it seemed that the instructors became less strict in the assessment of students' papers and research projects. After reviewing the award lists, which were available to the faculty, and marked answer scripts, it was noted that students were awarded good grades that contributed greatly to their overall CGPAs; however, their good grades were not compatible with their performances in their papers. One of the implications of this situation was that these circumstances made some of the faculty less vigilant regarding evaluation processes. For instance, the researchers noted two cases in which the faculty marked the papers without properly checking whether the answer was right or wrong; they gave good grades to all the students. According to the participants, another implication was that regional employers expressed their concerns about the skills of the university graduates with the argument that, even with good CGPAs, these students are not doing well in interviews or written tests. One of the faculty stated the following: "One of the employers told me that we conducted an interview for a clerical position where the university graduates were also the candidates… he said that although they had good grades which was not matching with their performance in the interview or test".

It was also noted that a sense of distrust and misunderstanding was prevalent among the faculty regarding the decision-making processes of the university, which was expressed by the participants during formal and informal chats with the researchers. For instance, the university had signed a partnership agreement with a foreign university exclusively for the capacity building of university faculty. Under the terms of the agreement, the foreign university would determine the suitability of a candidate for the said training, and the role of the university was limited to collecting and forwarding interested faculty members' applications to the foreign university. During the span of five years, a total of 42 faculty members visited the foreign country to get training in their respective fields. Upon completion of the said partnership, the university received an official letter from a ministry which stated that, according to an application received from the university employee [the ministry did not provide the name], the university administration did not ensure the equal representation of three sects in the said interventions. When the matter was investigated at the university level, it was noted that all three sects equally benefitted from the program and the same was conveyed to the ministry. However, it was noted that the equal representation was not an intentional act on part of the university; instead, the competencies of individual candidates determined their inclusion in the program.

As mentioned earlier, both the faculty and management were weary of this situation; the respondents suggested that the trust deficit among the faculty of different sects needs to be addressed as a first step. They asserted that the university employees must behave responsibly by not involving themselves in any kind of activities that could generate an impression of sectarianism in the university. As one of the faculty pointed out, "Some of the university employees express their particular behavior through social media, if you want to see the evidence of this phenomenon, visit Facebook pages of some university faculty and management. … the dangerous aspect of this practice is that university students have access to those pages who read the comments of faculty and making their own comments." A review of some of the pages of Facebook endorsed the claim of the faculty.

One of the management staff pointed out that recently the policies have changed in terms of fixing the gaps in the recruitment procedures: "Now we have new leadership for the last three years who have introduced new rules and regulations for the hiring of faculty and management; the new rules have totally neutralized the influence of sectarian elements in the hiring processes". Both the faculty and management staff suggested that in order to eliminate such a culture, the university needs to develop mechanisms that oversee various processes of teaching and learning in the university, such as assessment procedures, hiring processes, accountability mechanism, etc. One of the faculty emphasized that "a common forum should be provided to the faculty where they could involve in a discourse how to eliminate this menace from the university…unfortunately we don't have a such kind of a forum in the university for faculty… a few years back we had an association which has been banned from working". Another faculty member suggested that the integration among the faculty, which is superficial right now, is important to eliminate these tendencies.

Discussion

The Cold War events like Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Iranian Revolution had impacted the neighboring countries of the region. As a result of these political events, rise of militancy and sectarianism is germinated in Pakistan. And a wave of polarization enthralled the entire Pakistani society, which posed serious threats not only to the harmony of society, but also loom the existential threat to the social cohesiveness of the country. The peculiarity of this menace is that one cannot wage a total war to eliminate it, because of the involvement of transnational non-state actors vis-à-vis indigenous populations at intra-state level accommodate each other. Moreover, proxy elements of external powers empower the sectarian ideologues in the society.

Unfortunately, the impact of militancy and sectarianism is seriously observed practice in academic institutions. The academic institutions are meant to generate knowledge and provide future road map for any society. Academic institutions, with an approach to instill divisive thoughts are alarming situations for any society. To unravel this kind of intricate issues, it is significantly important to adopt specific strategies that are required through initiating culture of dialogues, confidence-building measures, and counseling to control the negative effects of this situation. Most importantly, proper education that disseminates a message of tolerance and harmony is considered an effective and primary approach for curbing negative tendencies against different groups and cultures.[33] Moreover, orienting students, faculty, staff and society with the fundamental values and principles of Islam, i.e. values like compassion, humility, tolerance and empathy highlighted in educational curricula, sensitization workshops, community engagements and counseling programs are effective approaches to mitigate the alarming conditions. However, the findings of this study are alarming, because existence of the said tendencies makes the sanctity of an educational institution questionable. It reflects that the academic institutions, which are supposed to prepare the young generation to become responsible citizens, unintentionally became a hostage of sectarianism.

The study shows that there are several factors contributed towards the negative effect sectarian in the university. The evidence collected through discussion and participatory observation suggests that since the early years of the establishment of the university, the region witnessed the worst sectarian strife in decades that crippled the whole business of the region, including the university. Two years after the creation of the university, the first Vice Chancellor of the university resigned, due to personal reasons, from his position, and an interim setup was installed to run the institution. It has been acknowledged that the organizational culture of any institution is largely affected by its structures/policies, staff characteristics, and the role of its leadership.[34] Likewise, the initial years of establishment of any organization are considered crucial, especially for setting directions, developing visions, and devising policies. On the basis of critical

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[33] SDPI. *The relationship between education and religious discrimination in Pakistan-analysis of curriculum and pedagogy in Pakistani schools;* M. Musofer. *Peaceful coexistence: Making space for differences.* Pakistan: Dawn, 2013.

[34] L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal. *Reframing the path to school leadership. A guide for teachers and principals.* Thousand Oaks, CA: A Sage Publications, 2002; M. Musofer. *Peaceful coexistence: Making space for differences.* Pakistan: Dawn, 2013; P. Hallinger and J. Murphy. "Instructional leadership in the school context." In *Instructional Leadership: Concepts, Issues and Controversies,* by W. Greenfield. (Boston MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc, 1987).

reviews of the initial years of the establishment of the case study university, one can assume that since a leadership factor was missing for some time, proper work was not done towards institutionalization of academic norms and also developing structures and policies for the university; the interim setup's responsibilities were limited to keeping the university operational. Therefore, it was much easier for external forces to develop influences for their personal gains and through different ways, in the fragile structure of the university. For instance, some of the faculty reported that during the early years of the establishment of the university there was a demand for equal representation in university committees, while offering university positions from the three sects, which was entertained without any resistance implicitly. "This was perhaps an indirect way of suggesting that sectarian considerations might have indeed shaped the decision-making process…"[35]

This precedent of accommodating sect based formation of committees continued, which enabled external forces to involve themselves in the affairs of the university, in fact outside element remained quite successful in dictating their terms to the university, as the evidence suggests. In addition, the worship places and religious authorities became vocal to seek quota for employment and other academic maters that effected academic culture. Referring to comment of management staff pointed out, as long as there were no clear recruitment policies, there was a sustained pressure from the community on the university that, while offering jobs, the formula of equal representation [of the three sects] must be ensured. Under these circumstances, the university had no choice except to following the external demands posed either directly from mosque or sometimes through student bodies. Through a tacit understanding, the university accepted the model of equal representation without realizing the long-term effect on the quality of its product [students] and the overall environment of the university. The remaining discrepancies that were reported in this paper were the rippling effects of the formula of equal representation. Instead of developing structures and policies for the newly established university, the successive Vice Chancellors spent most of their energy and time, through different measures, to neutralize the effects of sectarian culture in the university.

These non-academic issues consumed much of the university resources and energy and limited attention was paid to actual objectives like quality teaching and learning that could promote quality education in the university. For instance, a proper system of accountability remained a missing element that could have determined the teaching standards and quality of education in the university. It seems that teaching practices, such as what was happening inside the classrooms or how the instructors assessed the students, gained limited attention. Although the university was functioning smoothly, a subtle fear of backlash from the community and students was a driving force that led the faculty to contribute to the questionable competencies of students, as reported by the employers. A lack of an accountability mechanism, along with the sectarian pressure, posed many challenges to the university in terms of taking action against those elements whose performance and productivity was questionable. Referring to one of the faculty's opinion, when he tried to take action against a staff member whose efficiency was questionable, he was guarded by his sympathizers. Evidence from selected countries

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[35] Nosheen Ali. "Sectarian imaginaries: The Micro politics of Sectarianism. " *Current Sociology* 58:5 (2010), pp.738-754, p.744

such as Lebanon suggested that, as long as sectarian identities were used to run a system, there would exist a promotion of corruption, foreign intervention, and continuous cycles of violence.[36] When referring to the situation in which this study was conducted, Ali (2010) rightly pointed out that, "…the discourse of sectarian balance and equal treatment tends to become an anti-democratic political tool … hence, it ends up promoting a culture of sectarian prejudice and favoritism, instead of rectifying it."[37]

The faculty members realized that the divisive tendencies had negative impacts on the overall function of the university; however, it was noted that there were no incentive or proactive approach to curb the social pressures of society that continued to effect the institution and society at large. Research suggests that effective communication among multicultural teams is largely influenced for a viable socialization process of societal, institutional, and organizational factors. As the study noted, there were several reasons for the limited or non-involvement of faculty in reducing the influence of sectarian culture on the daily business of the university. One of the reasons, as reported by some of the participants, was a climate of distrust among the faculty. Since the trust deficit was significant, the faculty was reluctant to openly discuss the said phenomenon. Another issue that restricted the efforts of faculty was the absence of a common forum where they could be involved in an open discussion on this particular issue. As the participants pointed out, in the past the university had a faculty association, which was later prevented from functioning. Likewise, instead of using social media as a tool for propagating religious harmony, some of the elements used these media as forums for expressing their anger and discontent. These circumstances further widened the gaps between faculty members, and they became less motivated to engage in dialogue.

Although conflict has negative connotations and interpretations in a Pakistani context, research suggest that conflicts should be entertained as an opportunity to improve the performance of organizations and to address unresolved issues.[38] Therefore, open communication among the faculty should be a primary tool for mitigating the intensity of a situation, since avoiding or ignoring workplace conflicts could further aggravate the situation; a view also shared by some of the research participants. One of the strengths of the university is that almost majority of the faculty is young and can be motivated to initiate a dialogue through exposing them to some kind of conflict management training. Around the world universities are emerging as agents of social change, through addressing social problems of their respective societies and by reaching out to their respective societies/communities. The initiative taken by the university faculty to address the problems of sectarianism could be a great contribution in terms of regional transformation. Recently, the university's competent authority has given much focus to quality assurance cell, research initiatives and establishment of career development and counseling centre are positive signs.

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[36] BRD. "The sectarian political system; towards eradicating confessional tension", 2012. https://www.beyondrd.com/assets/publications/The%20Sectarian%20Political%20System%20(English)%20-%20BRD.pdf.

[37] N. Ali. "Sectarian imaginaries: The Micro politics of Sectarianism", p.749

[38] A. Khan. *A case study exploring perceived professional development needs for secondary school administrators in Pakistan, 2010.*

In the context of developing countries, it has already been reported that the quality and relevance of university teaching and learning tended to decline, due to an absence of a systematic performance evaluation.[39] Although limited to a certain geographical location, prevalence of sectarian culture is a new dimension that is contributing to the questionable quality of education at the tertiary level in Pakistan. Therefore, concerted efforts are required to minimize the influence of external factors on the university's teaching and learning processes, by developing mechanisms focusing on such matters as the monitoring of teaching and learning practices, introducing a transparent evaluation procedure with the help of rubrics, and developing job descriptions of academic/non-academic staff. Additionally, promotions, benefits, rewards, and punishments should be determined on the basis of an individual's performance in their teaching practices, in addition to length of service and number of research papers. Through education, a culture needs to be introduced that entertain religious diversity as an asset, not a challenge. As Moore (2007) stated, "A well-educated citizen must possess knowledge about comparative religions to understand references in literature, art, music, and politics."[40] He further added that for the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity, instructors should use instructional skills that generate critical thinking, questioning, and communication. It is important to infuse the value of diversity through academia to the minds of young graduates, which results to develop the notion of empathy, compassion, tolerance and humility, which are some of essential ingredients for viability of a pluralistic and sustainable society.

Conclusion:

Researchers have already showed their concerns about the quality of higher education in Pakistan and the influence of sectarian elements is a new phenomenon, which needs to be addressed through different measures.[41] Concerted efforts are required to develop tendencies among the students and faculties to accept multiculturalism as an asset and source of learning. And one of the most important steps in this regard is the pedagogical practices and instructional skills of the university faculty that should be explicit in terms of promoting tolerance, generating critical thinking, and fostering respect for diversity. Developments of societies are highly dependent on the quality of its academic institutions. Therefore, universities are becoming the power engine for creating of knowledge-based societies. Meaning that the fate of a society is primarily depends on the quality of education, nature of education being impart into students and society to cope with rapidly changing scenarios of our complex time period. Pakistan, which is a developing country has effected badly due to global and regional political struggles. As a result, a weak social cohesion is eroding the national will. This study examines the effect of the sectarianism menace of tertiary level education, which the effects of external influence exist in the same of sectarianism, socio-political forces influencing university

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[39] World Bank. *Constructing knowledge societies: New challenges for Tertiary Education*, 2002, p.58

[40] L. Moore. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to Teaching About Religion in Secondary School, p.2*

[41] A. Khan, S. Khan and S. Turi. "An exploratory study focusing on teaching and learning practices at the tertiary level in Pakistan: A case study of a public sector university." *International Journal of Educational Development, 2017.*

decisions for personal gains. Study concludes that effective institutionalization of rules & regulations are very important to mitigate external forces that desire to dictate university policies. And establishment of career development and counseling sections for behavioral change is significantly important to thrive an enabling environment for positive socialization of diverse community in the university. By doing this promotes the culture of inclusiveness not on quota basis rather acceptance of others on the basis of merit and quality. The changing patterns and practices are welcoming and healthy signs to address the bad experiences of past.