

EDUCATION AND WAR AGAINST TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN: EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Muhammad Ayub Buzdar,* Muhammad Naeem Mohsin,**
Riaz Ul Haq Tariq***

Abstract:

Pakistani society is facing massive challenges of religious extremism and terrorism in the country. It is observed that the extremism has penetrated in the educational institutions as well. The government has devised a policy to use education as a source to challenge religious extremism and ideologically motivated violence at the campuses in post 9/11 context. This paper aims to investigate the perceptions of university students about the role of curricula and instructions in reducing the challenge of religious extremism and terrorism at the campuses. Quantitative research design was followed to execute the inquiry. 3875 students selected from the 16 public and private sector universities of the country were included in the sample. A self-developed close ended questionnaire comprising 58 items was used to collect data. The information was collected on 5 point Likert type scale. Focus of the data collection was on examining the awareness of the research participants about proliferating religious extremism, violence and its causes in Pakistani context. Data were analyzed using statistical techniques. Findings of the inquiry demonstrate that students are aware of the issue and its causes in but they do not widely support the idea that our universities have potential to intellectually combat the terrorism. Revision in the curricula and teachers training process shifting its direction toward more liberal and democratic education system was recommended as outcome of the inquiry.

Introduction

Pakistan is facing massive terrorism from the last 2 decades. The violence, hate and intimidation however extensively rose after US attacks on Afghanistan in post 9/11 scenario. Pakistan supported

* Department of Education, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

** Department of Education, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

*** Chairman, National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, Islamabad, Pakistan

these attacks and officially accepted the US backed Karzai government in Afghanistan. Militants in the region raged a war against Pakistan attacking security and civil targets in the country. Data demonstrate that Pakistan is the fourth most affected country in the world [1]. Academia and educational institutions frequently faced violent and non-violent attacks in this time span. One calculation reveals that Pakistan faced 724 attacks on educational institutions from 2004 to 2013 that are comparatively far higher than Afghanistan (205 attacks), Iraq (184 attacks) and Nigeria (92 attacks) as well where *Boko Haram* has launched a violent campaign against mainstream education system [2]. We can observe a gap among the frequency of attacks on educational institutions in Pakistan and in other countries that unveils a terrible situation for the students and teachers in Pakistan.

Literature shows that education should prevent the students from radicalization and extremism [3, 4]. Contribution of university education is central in this background. It should develop social skills like tolerance, peace, co-existence, and harmony among the students. Inclination of well-educated people towards radical activities globally and in Pakistani context is emerged as a big challenge for educational institutions from last decade [5]. Higher education in Pakistan remained under severe criticism in this context. Different studies question its potential to academically and theoretically counter terrorism in Pakistan [6]. We in this research attempted to answer these questions.

The Current Study

This study is based on university students' reflections. We attempted to collect and analyze the perceptions of university students about the role of higher education institutions in preventing terrorism on theoretical and intellectual grounds. The students enrolled in public as well as private sector universities participated in the inquiry. The study fundamentally focused to answer the following research questions.

1. To what extent are the university students in sample aware of the concept of terrorism and do students enroll in public and private universities differ in their opinions in this regard?

2. How do the students in sample perceive causes of terrorism in Pakistani context and do the students of public and private universities differ in their perceptions in this regard?
3. How do the students in sample perceive the role of university in responding terrorism on intellectual grounds and do the students of public and private universities differ in their opinions in this regard?

Research Methodology

We followed survey research approach to achieve the objectives. Multi-phase sampling technique was used to select the respondents. In 2015, HEC included 67 degree awarding institutions in the ranking of general universities at national level. We divided the universities in six region wise strata and selected 22% units randomly from each stratum (Table 1).

Table 1: Region wise distribution of sampled universities

Universities	Public	Private	Total	22%	Selected
Chartered by Government of Pakistan	7	6	13	2.86	3
Chartered by Government of Punjab	11	10	21	4.62	5
Chartered by Government of Sindh	3	9	12	2.64	3
Chartered by Government of KPK	9	5	14	3.08	3
Chartered by Government of Baluchistan	2	1	3	.66	1
Chartered by Government of AJK	2	2	4	.44	1
Total	34	33	67	14.3	16

Total 16 universities were selected through this process. We randomly selected 5 departments from each selected university and then 50 students from each department. It formed a sample comprising 4000 university students. A close ended opinionnaire

was developed on 5-point Likert scale. Focus of the opinionnaire was to collect university students' perceptions about terrorism, its causes and university contribution in intellectually and theoretically response to terrorism. Validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through a pilot study in which 300 students selected from a reputed public sector university (not included in the sample) participated. The opinionnaire consisted of 62 items with 15 extracted factors through factor analysis process. The instrument was administered to 4000 selected students however 3875 students returned completely filled opinionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Findings of the Study

Quantitative data show that according to students' opinions, Pakistani universities have below than average ($M = 2.72$) potential to combat terrorism in current scenario (Table 2). It is however encouraging that the students are significantly aware of the concept of terrorism ($M = 3.45$) and its substantial causes. Foreign involvement ($M = 3.72$) and international agenda ($M = 3.69$) are emerged as two major causes of terrorism according to the students' responses. Government policies ($M = 3.48$), social injustice ($M = 3.44$), sectarianism ($M = 3.43$) and unemployment ($M = 3.38$) are also proliferating terrorism in the society. Inappropriate education as a cause of terrorism, that was dominant in teachers' opinion, could not attain attention of the students and remained lowest ($M = 3.19$) among the perceived causes of the terrorism in Pakistan. Students in the sample report that existing curricula is not responding terrorism effectively ($M = 3.05$) whereas the role of university teachers ($M = 3.26$) and overall quality of education system ($M = 3.46$) is comparatively better in reacting terrorism in the country. The students support revision of curricula ($M = 3.71$), training for teachers ($M = 3.60$) and a shift toward moderate and liberal education ($M = 3.52$) as major suggestions to combat terrorism on intellectual grounds.

A comparison among the opinions of students enrolled in public and private sector universities demonstrate significant differences among their viewpoints. It is found that awareness of the concept of terrorism is comparatively higher among the students of public

sector university students than their private sector fellows. For the potential of universities for combating terrorism, although the both sector students demonstrate discouraging tendency, the private sector university students are comparatively more unfavorable than the public sector university students. The students of public sector universities give comparatively more weightage to unemployment and government policies as causes of terrorism in Pakistan than their fellows

*Table 2: Mean scores showing central tendency of students' responses on different factors related with terrorism and university education**

Sr. #	Factor Name	Mean	SD
1	Awareness of the concept of terrorism	3.45	.682
2	Potential of universities to combat terrorism	2.77	.461
3	Unemployment as a cause of terrorism	3.38	.722
4	Social injustice as a cause of terrorism	3.44	.673
5	Sectarianism as a cause of terrorism	3.43	.690
6	International agendas as a cause of terrorism	3.69	.697
7	Inappropriate education as a cause of terrorism	3.19	.669
8	Foreign involvement as a cause of terrorism	3.72	.763
9	Government Policies as a cause of terrorism	3.48	.545
10	Responding terrorism through curricula	3.05	.631
11	Responding terrorism through teachers	3.26	.627
12	Responding terrorism through quality education	3.46	.696
13	Need of shifting towards a moderate and liberal education	3.52	.639
14	Need of revision in Curricula	3.71	.586
15	Need of teachers' training	3.60	.640

*Mean score is calculated on 5-point Likert type scale.

studying in private sector universities. A significant difference of opinion also exists in case of inappropriate education as a cause of terrorism. The opinion of private sector students do not show positive or negative tendency in this regard (M = 3.02). The public sector students however are support the notion that inappropriate education is a cause of falling students in terrorist organization (M = 3.28). Similarly, the public sector students are comparatively stronger supporter of the idea that existing intellectual response to terrorism is based on the provision of quality education. They are also stronger supporter of a shift towards moderate and liberal education and training of university teachers for intellectually responding terrorism.

Table 3: Results of independent-samples t-test comparing opinions of university students enrolled in public and private sector universities

Factors	University	Mean	MD	t	Sig.
Awareness of the concept of terrorism	Public	3.44	.101	4.184	.000
	Private	3.34			
Potential of universities to combat terrorism	Public	2.79	.043	2.706	.007
	Private	2.74			
Unemployment as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.41	.105	4.240	.000
	Private	3.31			
Social injustice as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.45	.040	1.747	.081
	Private	3.41			
Sectarianism as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.41	.038	1.583	.114
	Private	3.37			
International agendas as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.70	.058	2.445	.015
	Private	3.65			
Inappropriate education as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.28	.260	11.494	.000
	Private	3.02			
Foreign involvement as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.74	.030	1.151	.250
	Private	3.71			
Government Policies as a cause of terrorism	Public	3.51	.101	5.379	.000
	Private	3.41			

Responding terrorism through curricula	Public	3.03	-	-2.521	.012
	Private	3.09	.055		
Responding terrorism through teachers	Public	3.27	.019	0.879	.380
	Private	3.25			
Responding terrorism through quality education	Public	3.54	.252	10.684	.000
	Private	3.29			
Need of shifting towards a moderate and liberal education	Public	3.55	.073	3.339	.001
	Private	3.46			
Need of revision in Curricula	Public	3.71	.008	0.400	.690
	Private	3.70			
Need of teachers' training	Public	3.62	.073	3.308	.001
	Private	3.55			

Discussion

Major objective of this study was to investigate the university students' perceptions about the role and potential of Pakistani higher education institutions for developing an anti-terror environment and discourse for learners. We developed an opinionnaire to collect the required information from the students. The findings demonstrate that the level awareness of the concept of terrorism is not significantly high among the university students. It is however important that the understanding is comparatively higher among the students of public sector universities than their fellows enrolled in private sector degree awarding institutions. It is important that according to the students' opinions potential of Pakistani universities to challenge terrorism is deteriorated. Data show that the perceptions of private sector university students about the potentials of universities are comparatively more discouraging than their fellows enrolled in public sector institutions. The current study supports the idea that un-employment, social injustice, sectarianism and emotional blackmailing are major causes of terrorism in Pakistan. Literature demonstrates that these ideas are not new in Pakistan. Many researchers and popular media have already highlighted these issues as major causes of terrorism [3, 7, 8]. The significant numbers of students claim that foreign involvement is the reason of terrorism proliferation in Pakistan. The

public sector university students are lightly but significantly stricter than their private sector fellows on the issue that super powers are promoting terrorism in Pakistan to achieve their global agendas. Researchers like Zimmermann [9] discussed the linkages between globalization and terrorism in detail. He postulates that global issues have aggravated the nature of relationships among different global players and in many cases it results in the shape of violence and unrest among different countries.

The university students support the notion that inappropriate educational facilities are the major causes of terrorism in Pakistan. Level of agreement is however significantly high among the public sector university students. The opinions of private sector students are nearly balanced on this issue. The university students included in the sample also support the idea that government policies are a cause of terrorism in the country. Results of t-test demonstrate that the dissatisfaction with government policies is comparatively higher among the students of public sector universities than their private sector fellows. These findings are consistent with the previous literature in which Pakistan education system faces severe criticism [6].

Data collected from the university students show that they are moderately satisfied with the government efforts to counter terrorism through providing quality education. Mean difference shows that the satisfaction level is comparatively higher among public sector students than their fellows of private sectors. The students however support a shift toward liberal and moderate education to combat terrorism. Results of t test reveal that the desire of change for liberal education is comparatively higher among public sector students than their private sector fellows. Mean scores show that the students of the Pakistani universities are in favor of curriculum revision and teachers training. Public sector university students however give comparatively more weightage to teacher training than their fellows enrolled in private sector universities. Literature demonstrates that quality education that sensitizes citizenship, fundamental rights and cultural identities is a better source of responding terrorism and extremism [10].

Conclusions

The study concludes that university students included in the sample are moderately aware of the concept of terrorism and its causes in Pakistani context. Majority students have distinctive understanding of the violent and non-violent terrorism. We also conclude that level of awareness is comparatively higher among the students of public sector universities than their fellows enrolled in private institutions. The students in the sample accept social injustice, un-employment, inappropriate education, foreign involvement and sectarianism as major causes of terrorism in Pakistan. Intensity of the perceptions of students enrolled in public sector universities is comparatively higher than their fellows of private sector institutions for un-employment, international involvement, social injustice and inappropriate education as major causes of terrorism in Pakistan.

The current study also concludes that according to university students, the potential of higher education institutions to counter terrorism on intellectual and theoretical grounds is comparatively low. There is difference between the intensity of deterioration in public and private sector students' opinions. The private students' opinions place the potential of higher education to counter terrorism comparatively lower than the public sector students' assessment of the potential. Majority students urge on the needs of revising curricula and university teachers training for capacity development. The students also accept the suggestion of shifting higher education system toward a liberal and democratic education in Pakistan.

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