

The Issues of Madrasa Students in Pakistan: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract

The objective of the present study was to investigate the realities and issues of madrasas students in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The word madrasa is used for religious school in Pakistan. The current paper highlights the problems of madrasa students as a serious issue in Pakistan, which is almost unexplored area in Pakistan, data are scarce. In the present study individual interviews were conducted, applying a qualitative approach for getting the in depth knowledge about the subject. Grounded theory method was used for data analysis and NVIVO – 10 was used for information processing. Majority of the madrasas students shared that we had to issues like unemployment, poor infrastructure of madrasas, lack of water, electricity, the concept of fundraising, which negatively effects self-respect and ego of the students, and named as terrorist is another problem for madrasa students, which rise to economic hardship. The participants also pointed out few fundamental roles madrasa plays in society. First, it provides divine knowledge; second, it accommodates marginalized population of society; third, it manufactures nonviolent and literate citizens, which eventually provide them opportunities of employment, and by this way, helps the state. The findings of the present study possibly will assist the all stakeholders to resolve the issues of madrasa students in Pakistan.

Keywords: Madrasas; Unemployment; Pakistan; Issues

Introduction

In Pakistan, madrasas have long peaceful history and services towards community [1,2]. In reality, the lack of empirical research on madrasa has made it a blend of myth and reality [3]. The vacuum and lack of information on madrasas, has, motivated the scholar to investigate and understand Islamic institutions scientifically. To the best of researcher's knowledge, no qualitative research, in Pakistani context, exists that had viewed madrasas students regarding their issues. The present study intends to fill this gap by documenting the viewpoints of madrasa students regarding different perspectives on madrasas. The importance of present research becomes more relevant as approximate two million children in Pakistan are studying in madrasas [4]. Apparently, madrasas are playing peaceful roles in society and their services towards; increasing literacy rate, increasing religious morality and human values, discourage criminality, giving space to lowered class of society, and accordingly, maintaining a social order is commendable [5].

Madrasa derived its origin from the Arabic verb "darasa" (to study), which refers in South Asia to religious teaching school or disseminating Islamic knowledge. The madrasas in today's form in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, represent the legacy of Islamic religious education in India. During the late nineteenth century, Deoband Madrasa was founded in 1867. The madrasas generally follow a curriculum known as Dars-i-Nizami, which was firstly introduced in 1747 by Mullah Nizamuddin Siharvi, a scholar of some repute in Islamic philosophy in Lucknow. All Sunni madrasas, regardless of any sect of Deobandi, Barelvi, or Ahl-i-Hadith, follow the same standardized Nizami course adopted by the Deoband madrasa in 1867. The curriculum consists of about twenty subjects categorized

two segments: al-ulum an-naqliya (the transmitted sciences), and al-ulum al-aqliya (the rational sciences). The subject areas mainly cover logic, grammar, philosophy, Arabic literature, life of the Prophet, medicine, mathematics, Islamic law, Hadith, and Tafsir (exegesis of the Quran). It is a worth noting that out of twenty subjects only eight relate to religion. The remaining subjects are secular and were included in Darse-Nizami curriculum to equip the students with civil service job skills. Unfortunately, facilities like books, libraries, and even instructors are not generally available in all madrasas. This is more prevalent in subjects of medicine, mathematics, and history. Consequently, to complete their curriculum the students more often have to shift from one madrasa to another. These practices lead in the failure to institutionalize grading system and promotion procedures of madrasas. Furthermore, migration of students from one institution to another creates a bound of unity despite having various faiths. The Pakistani madrasa sector reflects the religious background of Pakistan [6]. Various sects of religion have their own madrasas including the Shia, the Sunni Ahl e Sunnat (Barelvi) and the Deobandis, along with the Saudi-inspired Ahl al Hadith or Ahl e Hadith (salafi), and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami [7]. In late 1950s, the madrasas organized themselves into a board, "wafaqul-madaris" which was responsible for registration, accreditation of madrasas, curriculum and examinations.

In Pakistan, the survey data shows that over 98% of the population is Muslims. The Muslims are further divided into different sects which are called schools of jurisprudence i.e. (School of Thoughts) 'Maktab-e-Fikr' in local national language. In Pakistan, Muslims are divided into schools: the Barelvis, Deobandis, Ahle Hadith, Shia and other smaller sects [8]. The Ahl e Sunnat (Barelvi) sect was founded by Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi in India in 1880 while the Deobandi sect originated in India in 1850s. Similarly, the Islamists are mainly represented by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) political party, founded by the Islamist ideologue Mawlana Maududi in 1941. Madrasas offer a free

education, lodging and boarding to their students, therefore they more appeal to poor families and individuals. Generally, the Madrasas are supported by private donations/charity contributions along with voluntarily contributions from Muslim believers through a process of alms-giving known in Arabic as zakat. The practice of zakat is one of the five pillars of the Islamic belief. Zakat is given on proportion of one's income fixed on time frame. Traditionally a portion of zakat has been donated to religious education (madrasas). In an economy, where cost of education is high and poverty and underdevelopment, exists "free education, lodging and boarding facilities have attracted the poorer to madrasas.

Urdu is commonly the medium of instruction in Pakistani madrasas. However, in the Pashto-speaking parts of the K.P.K (Khyber Pakhtoon Khaw), Pashto is the medium of instruction while Sindhi is the medium of instruction in Sindhi-speaking parts of the Sindh Province. Urdu, fundamentally remain the major language of expression. English is not taught in all the madrasas. Two objections are normally raised on madrasas. One, the madrasa-curriculum is out dated in economic dominated market of society. Therefore, madrasas do not impart market oriented education which bleaks the market value of its graduates. Ultimately, madrasas students become economic burden on rest of the society as religious employment is marginal [9]. Secondly, the terrorism or militancy is associated to Islamic education of Madrasa. In reality, it has no connection at all; rather economic depression and social injustice played a vital role in this phenomenon. Madrasa acts as a safety-valve in society and keeps people away from heinous crimes like bomb blast, murder, suicide attacks etc. It keeps youth contented, peaceful and nonviolent. Madrasas provide not only mental and spiritual satisfaction, but also provide amenities of life, like, food, shelter, clothes, medical cover, and even pocket money. It also provides opportunities of employment in the religious market, after the completion of education.

Historically, madrasa has been the only institution of Muslim society that has provided formal along with religious education without any difference. Historically madrasa-graduates were recognized only the educated person; and mostly, state-officials were madrasa qualified people. In India, this process continued up to the Mughal-era. When English people captured India, they divided education into 'secular' and 'religious' segment to meet their requirements. Unfortunately English regime rendered political and financial support to 'secular' education system only. It is pride of madrasa that it kept on surviving and continued imparting religious education to masses. It became possible because civil society supported, and trusted, this institution. Infact the society needed it. In reality, madrasas play a dynamic role from birth to death of an individual. The presence of millions of students in madrasas across Pakistan is indicative of public trust on this institution that firmly justifies its existence in society.

Methodology

The participants of the present study were registered religious madrasas students from three madrasas in Islamabad. Religious students, the potential respondents of the study, were contacted at their work places with the due permission of madrasas' administrators. Students from three madrasas in Islamabad were interviewed. In first meeting they were informed about this study and its objectives; and then, they were asked to participate. Individual interviews were conducted, applying a qualitative approach for getting the in depth knowledge about the subject. A total of 140 students were

approached for interviews. Surprisingly, out of 140 only 40 students got agreed to be the part of the study and participated in interviews. The response rate was just 29% which is also one of the limitations of the present study. The students were provided a written code of ethics in Urdu version, explaining the rights of research-participants. The interview questions were open ended. The list included the questions: 1) what are the issues of madrasa, or how madrasa became an issue; 2) why madrasa exists in society i.e. what is the justification of madrasa in the presence of mainstream educational system; 3) why some students prefer to join madrasa instead of going mainstream schools; 4) what are the funding sources of madrasa; 5) which type of education, ideology and training madrasa inculcates in its students, which determines their future social role. Majority of the students were reluctant to give interviews due to their busy schedule of classes and other study related commitments therefore only 40 interviews could be conducted, and each interview took 20 to 30 minutes, including consent forms signed and an orientation about the interviews. The discussions were held in Urdu (the first language of the respondents). With the prior approval of madrasa administration, as well as respondents, the discussions were audio-recorded and written notices were taken. The students who participated in research were females as well as males. The age range was from 16 to 30 years (Demographics are presented in Table 1).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	20	50%
Female	20	50%
Age		
Less than 20 years	10	25%
21-25 years	20	50%
More than 25 years	10	25%
Marital Status		
Married	5	12.50%
Un-married	35	87.50%
Experience in madrasa		
Less than 2 years	10	25%
3-5 years	20	50%
More than 5 years	10	25%
Issues		
Poor Infrastructure	40	100%
Unemployment	40	100%
Economic problems	40	100%
Self-image of students	40	100%
Are these issues effect the psychological well-being of students	40	100%

Table 1: The main characteristics of the sample.

All the audio recorded qualitative data acquired from students, in Urdu language, were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was translated into English language (the researchers are comfortable in both languages: Urdu and English). The author's read all interviews independently and used NVIVO – 10 for information processing. One of the most significant developments in qualitative research in the last 20 years is the emergence of computer software that can assist in the use of qualitative data analysis. NVIVO removes many if not most of the clerical tasks associated with the manual coding and retrieving of data. For data analysis, grounded theory method [1] was used in the present study. Grounded theory outlines a few-step process in which the researcher moves. 1- First of all the researcher begins with a general question. 2- Relevant people and incidents are theoretically sampled. 3- Relevant data are collected. 4- Data are coded which generate concepts. 5- Through a constant comparison of indicators and concepts categories are generated. The crucial issue is to ensure that there is a fit between indicators and concepts. 6- Relationships between categories are explored in such a way that hypothesis about connections between categories emerge. 7- The theory is explored using grounded theory process in relation to different settings from that in which it was generated. In order to ensure the validity of data, the initial write-up of the results was shared with the participants of the study: they confirmed it and showed no reservation.

Findings

During interviews, while sharing their experiences students said, that we had to issues like unemployment, poor infrastructure of madrasas, lack of water, electricity problem, the concept of fundraising, which negatively effects self-respect and ego of the students, named as terrorist is another problem for madrasas students, which rise to economic hardship. All the respondents linked these issues with the overall psychological well-being of the madrasas students. Generally, the concept of psychological well-being draw on various conceptualizations of mental health. Psychological well-being means experiencing positive emotions and also in the sense of experiencing a positive state of mental health.

Some respondents also justified madrasas existence in society at three reasons: one, rich people find correct place to spend their charities in the performance of their religious duties like zakat and sadqat etc; two, it provides opportunity for poor to get education, learn religion, and earn living in religious market. In this regard, madrasa offers them free education, shelter, food and all other basic amenities of life. Thirdly, religion virtues and obligations are being performed by madrasas in the capital market where people find little time for religious duties. Thus madrasa is functional for all segments of population whether rich or poor to meet societal needs; the respondents articulated. According to respondent's views, madrasas perform some distinct social and educational functions that actually justify their existence in the society. The participants pointed out few fundamental roles madrasa plays in society. First, it provides divine knowledge; second, it accommodates marginalized population of society; third, it manufactures nonviolent and literate citizens, which eventually provide them opportunities of employment, and by this way, helps the state. In participant's views, a state has to perform three basic responsibilities for society: security, health, and education. When these responsibilities are not fulfilled by the state, the society makes its own arrangement to fill the gap through madrasas.

It was also found during discussions with madrasas students that natural disasters and hardships in life also attract admissions in

madrasas. In this regard, some of the students specifically drew attention towards the recent earthquake in Northern Pakistan. The earth-quack caused to leave many children without guardians. The madrasas adopted these children and perform parental responsibilities by arranging all necessities of life including family atmosphere, shelter and free education. Madrasas perform adoption of orphans as religious duty as Muslims are bounded by religion to take care of needy and poor people of society. In general, the madrasa students are needy and poor: therefore, people donate their donations and charities to madrasas. Some of the respondents also mentioned an Islamic injunction about charities giving that preference should be given to the nearest needy. Thus, the people send their zakat, sadqat, skins of sacrificed animals and other kinds of donation's, preferably, to nearest (local) madrasas. This is how madrasa's economic affairs run.

In reality, madrasa teaches a philosophy of love, peace, kindness, and well-wishing for all mankind. Madrasa teachings emphasis that human life being most respectable entities. Islam proclaims that an innocent homicide is like a destruction of all mankind; and saving just one life is like the saving of all mankind. It also affirms 'suicide' a terrible crime. According to Islamic teaching suicider will not be forgiven by the God. Madrasa teachings suggest that all community is God's family: and therefore, serving this family causes pleasure of God almighty. Consequently, it is illogical to even think that madrasa students can become terrorists or suicide attackers to takes innocent lives. Rather, madrasa students are the most law-abiding citizens of the state. Similarly some students said, "Islamic teachings in madrasa discourage all forms of terrorism, injustice, extremism and intolerance". They also stressed that madrasas were not military training bases or centers: rather, they are centers of learning and practicing what God has said and the Prophet has interpreted. The participants invited all those people who criticize and blame madrasa as producing militants that they should physically visit madrasas, explore curriculum and do not construct hypothetical data while sitting in their offices. They said that madrasas are always open for surprise-visits. Madrasa students are the most peaceful and contented youth that never indulges in any kind of anti-social activities, like, strikes, protests, and destruction (as many school/college students sometimes do).

Discussion and Conclusion

Building on Islamic philosophies of charity and the importance of education in Islam, most madrasas offer free education, as well as free lodging and boarding. The data explored justified madrasas existence in society because of its socially accepted roles. The madrasas students mentioned numerous social roles madrasa plays in society: one, it delivers divine knowledge; two, it provides marginalized population with life-necessities and education; three, it produces law-abiding literate citizens for state; and four, it also provides them employment opportunities as well. Besides this, madrasa has also a spiritual healing function where people come for dua and taviz.

Most of the Pakistan's madrasas are, however, modest in facilities, size and resources. Majority of the madrasas are housed inside or adjacent to the local mosque. These madrasas are funded by the societies; the local imam is normally the head of the madrasa and former madrasa students are employed as teachers either on a voluntary basis or on minimal wages. Private Madrasas are dependent on society support to exist and to grow. In Pakistan people have great trust on madrasas, and thus, it has been hub of social and religious

educational activities. In the same line, the data of the present study explored that madrasa is equally important for rich and poor Muslims. For example, for rich, it provides place to invest charities (compulsory and optional) for the purpose to perform religious duties and to please God here and hereafter. On the other hand poor get benefit from this charity and send their children to learn religious education free of cost.

Another aspect of this discussion is about to the quality and relevance of the education provided in madrasas. Madrasa education is frequently criticized for being outdated and of little relevance to contemporary society. Further, the way of instructions is also objectionable which is based on 'rutta'-memorizing without having an understanding. There are, however, significant differences in terms of the education offered in Pakistan's various madrasas. Many of the larger madrasas are well organized and well equipped; they follow a standardized curriculum and hold regular examinations under a board wafaq ul madaris. Madrasas such as the Jamia Naeemia in Lahore, the Dar ul Uloom Naeemia in Karachi and the Khair-ul-Madaris in Multan, already offer a worldly education besides the religious subjects. Many prominent researchers like [10,11] have revealed that madrasa does not impart any skill to its student that could enable them to earn living from economic market. In this regard, the present study explored that earning is not main focus of madrasa education. Rather, the mission of madrasa is to train students for future religious roles. Interestingly, society also expects the same. If madrasa students choose professions other than religion, the society automatically would stop financing to it: and the existing system of religious education would not stay alive. Madrasa morally trains students to avoid sin and crime, thus, it contributes in culmination of social factors that leads to criminality (economic factor and moral decay). In this sense, madrasa helps in maintaining social order in society. Numerous studies have also concluded that religious people and madrasas students have more prosocial attitude [12-14]. An overwhelming majority of madrasas in Pakistan—as in India and Bangladesh—are engaged in traditional Islamic studies and are not involved in any militant activities, or even sectarian strife. In fact, most of them shy away from politics in order to concentrate on their primary mission. Considering the market needs, now Islamic courses traditionally taught in madrasas are being offered by some modern private chain of schools like Iqra public school and Al Huda academy etc.

The present study, like all qualitative researches, has also certain limitations. Normally, qualitative research, because of its in-depth nature, relates to small and selective sampling. This selective sampling suggests low population validity, and can be considered as weakness of the study [15,16]. The major limitation of the study was the generalizability of the findings as the sample was drawn only from

three madrasas in Islamabad: therefore, the finding of this study cannot be generalized over the madrasas of all sects. The response rate is a major limitation, 40 out of 140 is less than 30%. A Madrasas issue is almost unexplored area in Pakistan, and majority of the students and teachers of madrasas are reluctant to give interviews due to the sensitivity of the subject, therefore data are scarce. As we are living in modern technology and globalization era so in this regard Government should take initiatives and make some productive policies in the favor of madrasas students to utilize their talent in the best interest of the country.

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