

Education for Sustainable Development and Social Tolerance: Evidence from Teacher Education Institutions in Pakistan

NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability
2022, Vol. 5(1) Pages 46-60



njips.nust.edu.pk

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v5i1.121>

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Abstract

Education for sustainable development is an evolving notion in teacher education that highlights the need for tolerance, acceptance, and diversity. Therefore, there is a greater need to elucidate the contributions of teacher educators in promoting social tolerance through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). In addition, it is crucial to understand the challenges faced by teacher educators while dealing with the intolerant, extremist views and/or behaviors in a particular social setting. In doing so, this research interviewed teacher educators (N=12) through a purposive sampling strategy to determine the respondents' views about promoting social tolerance strategies integrated with ESD. The data was analyzed through qualitative data analysis software (NVivo), and themes were extracted based on the analysis plots. The research argues that promoting social tolerance within teacher education through ESD is a multi-layered process and requires attention at the policy level. It suggests that the existing structure of the Teacher Education program and the curricula are barely in line with the indicated ESD contents and strategies (integration with teaching and learning) needed to promote social tolerance and societal peace in Pakistan.

Keywords

Social tolerance, sustainable development, teacher education, violent extremism

Introduction

Pakistan is a diverse and heterogeneous country based on a linguistic, ethnic, religious, and cultural plurality (Ahmed, 2018). This diversity of the country's language, culture, ethnicities, and religion is not an excuse for conflict but a prospect that enriches us all to create a peaceful and coherent society (Khalid & Mahmood, 2013). However, during the last few decades, it has been observed that Pakistan is facing various ethno-religious or identity-based conflicts (Abdullah & Saeed, 2016). Similar issues have also been observed in higher education institutions of Pakistan,

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where violent behavior or intolerance has increased significantly (Atif et al., 2019). Incidents related to student violence and target killings motivated by ethno-religious, sectarian, political, cultural, or linguistic, i.e., identity-based differences have become a recurring phenomenon in Pakistan (Khalid & Mahmood, 2013; Abdullah & Saeed, 2016; Atif et al., 2019).

In June 2014, the Supreme Court of Pakistan made a particular decision regarding the education sector in Pakistan. The decision established the necessary requirement of suitable educational and instructive plans at institutions to promote a culture of religious and social tolerance (Sajjad, 2018). The court orders were given in the backdrop of increasing incidents of intolerance in educational institutes across Pakistan. The Supreme Court's decision was reflective of the United Nations' (UN) 'Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief' (General Assembly resolution 36/55). The declaration is committed to promoting resilience, tolerance, the right to freedom of thought, and solidarity among individuals (see also Mukhtar, 2017). In the 'Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance', the term *tolerance* is defined as (UNESCO, 1995): "Respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression, and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference" (p. 2).

Similarly, Zerfu and colleagues (2009) discuss that the social ties or networking(s) between the individuals (or 'self') are principally driven by the existing similarities and commonalities (e.g., socio-cultural, religious, and/or ideological). Consequently, the social identities that are formed as a result of these social ties and networking are often homogenous; hence, they develop a strong 'in-group vs. out-group' phenomenon and a sense of 'otherness' or 'us vs. them' (Wise & Driskell, 2017; Miller et al., 2010).

The idea of peace and inclusive education has long established the potential role of teachers in creating a social unit within the instructional setting to strengthen diverse social networks (Causey et al., 2000). Furthermore, it has been elucidated that before educators can recognize how issues such as religious, ethnic, racial, social, economic, and political inequalities influence the socio-cultural realities and learning experiences of the students, an educator must be self-aware of their own cultural, religious, civic, linguistic and socio-political orientations (Howard, 2003). Therefore, to build a coherent and inclusive society, it is mandatory to understand the root causes of intolerance — i.e., both at the individual/self and societal level. Concerned literature also conceives 'education' as a tool through which prejudice can be reduced either by using the teaching content or through the influence of educators (Kumashiro et al., 2004). It is equally important to understand that the intolerance and extremist attitudes or views are not only the product of the externally-induced environment (parents, family, or broader societal values) but also of the educators' environment (Rapp & Freitag, 2015). Nevertheless, the necessary knowledge for effectively promoting dynamic social tolerance through teaching and education programs is an evolving concept (Mirza, 2015).

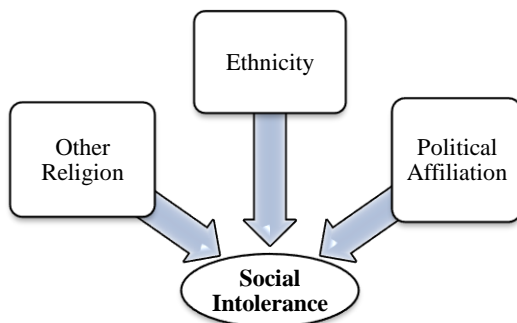
Moreover, it also needs to be recognized that teacher education and ESD have a close association as educators are considered key 'agents' for fostering values of peace, harmony, and cohesion, among students and communities at large (Hopkins & Kohl, 2019). Several scholars have reported that the incorporation of ESD in teacher education positively impacts the capacity building and professional development. Furthermore, ESD delivers the youth the essential capability and means of action(s) to achieve sustainable development and positive transformation in society (Olsson et al., 2016). Since 2015, the international community has recognized the

importance of ESD to avert violence and extremism and promote tolerance within educational institutions. As the United Nations organization for education, UNESCO is assigned to arrange and lead the ‘Agenda 2030 for Education’, which serves as a worldwide development to guarantee quality and access to education (Owens, 2017).

Dempsey and colleagues (2011) associate ‘social cohesion’ with the idea of ‘sustainable communities’ (p. 5) and outline five interrelated and quantifiable dimensions: networks in the community and participation in the shared groups; social interaction; community durability; sense/pride of place; social wellbeing; and, security (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). With regards to this research, the idea of ‘sustainable communities’ helped to examine how ‘social tolerance’ in ESD is perceived and, more importantly, how it can serve as a *social pillar*² of sustainable development (Bramley et al., 2006). For this reason, ESD is frequently comprehended as education that inspires change in knowledge, values, attitudes, and necessary skills to permit a more sustainable and inclusive society (Rauch & Steiner, 2013). Hence, teacher-education institutions and teacher educators are important for developing the knowledge, skills, and values to inform and shape practices that encourage a sustainable and inclusive society (Huckle & Wals, 2015).

To effectively impart knowledge, skills, and values needed to encourage tolerance in educational settings, teacher educators must be well acquainted with the best teaching techniques. For instance, teacher educators must recognize that teaching-learning techniques and curriculum are the subsets of their pedagogy (Bertschy et al., 2013). This drives inseparably with the information and capacities teachers need to influence the decisions of units of adoptions in a desirable direction, at least from their perspective. That is why pre-service teachers are often recognized as dynamic ‘agents of change’ (Van der Heijden et al., 2015).

Figure 1. Sub-factors of social intolerance

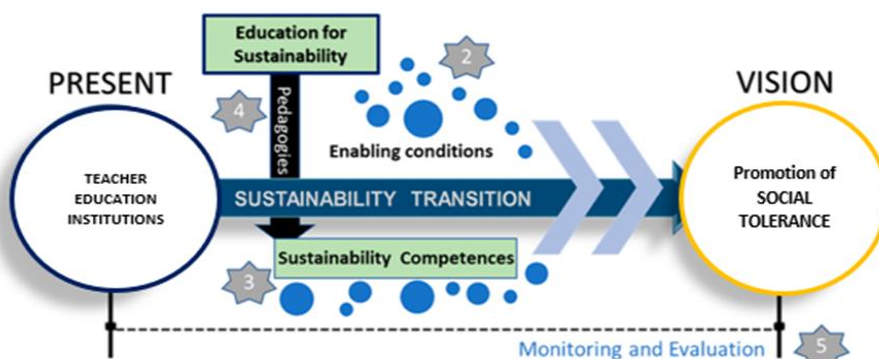


Nonetheless, to understand the prominent factors promoting and influencing social intolerance, this research identified nine main factors: i.e. nationality, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, political association, and sexual orientation (Keane & Heinz, 2016).

² The social pillar refers to, in broad terms, public policies that support social issues. These social issues relate to our wellbeing and include aspects like healthcare, education, housing, employment, etc. For more information, see (Murphy, 2012).

However, as far as the presented analysis is concerned, this research considered three main factors: (i) ethnicity (i.e., the state of belonging to a specific ethnic-social identity), (ii) religion (a system of worship, faith, and beliefs), and (iii) political affiliation (the state of being closely associated with a political party). These mentioned factors have been considered determinants of intergroup and/or inter-identity intolerance and extremist conduct in educational institutions (see Figure 1). This research aims to explore the views and experiences of teacher educators concerning social tolerance (i.e., in terms of awareness and practice) and the need for ESD. Furthermore, it examines the challenges that teacher educators must face while preparing prospective teachers to deal with the intolerant and extremist views/behaviors in social settings.

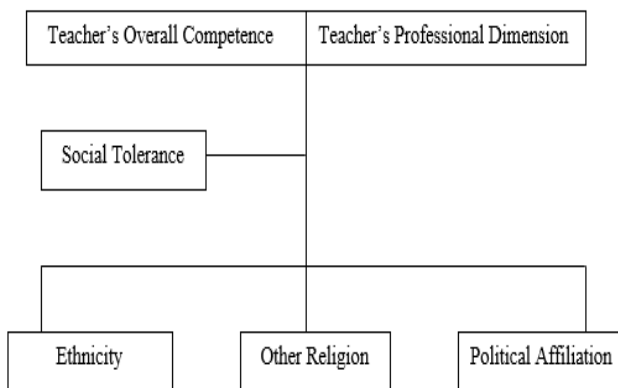
Figure 2. The framework of the study



Methodology

The study follows the interpretivist paradigm to elucidate the expansion of different social realities (e.g., Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The research design for this study envisioned a qualitative approach, containing descriptive data collection and knowledge assortment through the interviews of teacher educators. The discussions were guided by open-ended and probing questions to understand the perspective of teacher educators in detail. The data was collected between February and June of 2021. Keeping in view the societal context of Pakistan and research objectives, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed. The protocol aimed to explore the teacher educators’ overall competence and professionalism toward ESD and tolerance factors. The factors included in-service teachers’ observations, experiences, the present level of social tolerance, awareness, willingness, and competence toward ESD and promotion of social tolerance. In addition, research also explored the views of teacher educators about three main sub-factors, i.e. religion, ethnicity, and political affiliation (see figure:1; Bangwayo-Skeete & Zikhali, 2013), affecting the construct of student tolerance within an educational setting. During the interviews, special attention was paid to research ethics and sensitivity concerning race/ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation.

Figure 3. Interview protocol and the related themes



Finally, the conformity and dependency measures were confirmed and validated by the external auditors, who also supervised the data collection, validation, and analysis and also ensured that the participants of this study consisted of 12 teacher educators who are serving as regular faculty in teacher training institutions located in Lahore (for details, see Table 1).

Table 1. Details about the education institutes

	<i>Name of the University</i>	<i>Department</i>
<i>Public</i>	University of Lahore	Division of Education (BRC, TC, LMC)
	University of Punjab	Institute of Education and Research
	Lahore College for Women University	Institute. Of Education
<i>Private</i>	University of Lahore	Arts & Social Sciences
	University of Management and Technology	Arts & Social Science
	Beaconhouse National University	Education

The interview participants also included directors and senior faculty members. However, this study focuses on exploring in-service teacher educators' perspectives on ESD implementation within teacher education (for respondents' categorization and details, see Table 2). Therefore, it became necessary and appropriate to use a purposive sampling technique to identify the educators with relevant backgrounds and experiences because purposive selection involves identifying an assortment of individuals or groups who are well informed and proficient with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative aspects based on stakeholder feedback can be measured in future studies. Furthermore, as a next step, the relationship between the various dimensions of sustainable development can be investigated using longitudinal approaches based on data content analysis.

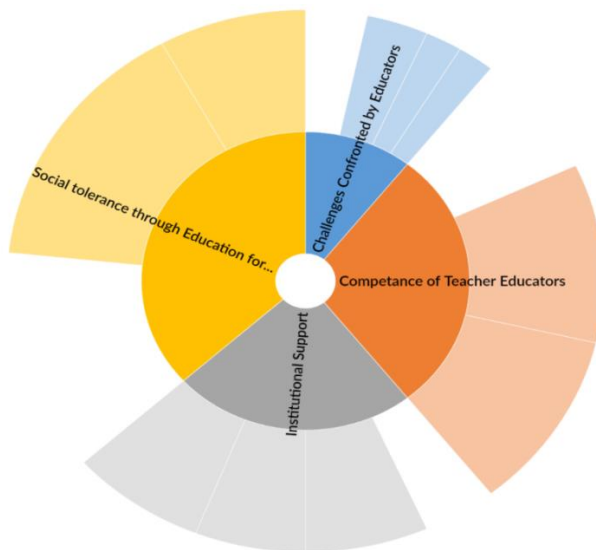
Table 2. Details about the respondents

	<i>University Respondent</i>	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Academic Rank</i>			
		Female	Male	lecturer	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Professor
<i>Public</i>	Uni-1 (n=3)	2	1	1	1	0	1
	Uni-2 (n=1)	1	0	0	1	0	0
	Uni-3(n=2)	1	1	1	1	0	0
<i>Private</i>	Uni-4(n=1)	0	1	0	0	1	0
	Uni-5(n=3)	3	0	2	1	0	0
	Uni-6(n=2)	1	1	1	0	0	1

To ensure the credibility and reliability of data, this research welcomed the respondents to check the provided responses and the detailed interview transcripts. Since the purpose of this research was to understand the teacher educators’ perspectives and practices of social tolerance, the researcher did not ask for any soliciting personal information or any information that could make teacher educators feel vulnerable in any manner. In addition, necessary consents were secured from all the respondents after providing them with the research objectives, interview protocol, and potential outcomes (via introductory e-mail). To deal with data confidentiality and ethics, respondents have been assigned pseudonyms.

Data analysis and interpretation were performed by categorical accumulation, explicit interpretation, formation of patterns, and description of cases (Creswell et al., 2007). The interview transcriptions (including research notes) were coded through an open coding process throughout the data analysis. The process enabled this research to cluster the data around the relevant identified factors and four (sub) themes (see Figure 4). Furthermore, the data was explicated and classified with the help of qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 Plus (see Figure 4 & 6). Patterns and data linkage were sought, and analysis of interviews has been presented through a Word Tag Cloud and Word Tree Maps (see Figure 5 & 8). Such supplementary analysis exhibitions revealed intriguing patterns and apparent contradictions (see Figures 5 & 8).

Figure 4. Nvivo Theme Map



Theme1: Educator’s Insights about Social Tolerance through ESD

ESD was recognized as an important medium for promoting social tolerance for teacher educators. Three of the respondents mentioned that knowledge, skills, and attitudes need to be incorporated by educators into their instructional repertoire to reflect a more transformative stance. For instance, according to one of the respondents ‘Ayesha’ an assistant professor, ESD requires educators to be more familiar with their responsibilities to address the various social problems. In particular, the respondent believed that educators could play a vital role in preventing (violent) extremism and promoting social cohesion and tolerance (Ayesha, personal communication, March 04, 2021).

Similarly, ‘Faiz’ and ‘Fatimah’, associate professor and lecturer respectively, believed that ESD requires learners to adopt the values of open-mindedness, acceptance, and respect for divergent viewpoints and perspectives from other social groups (personal communication, April 2021). Most teacher educators were certain that to integrate ESD into their teaching, one must be aware of the subject that establishes ESD and helps develop a positive attitude towards it. Furthermore, it was mentioned during the interviews that educators need to be well aware of the appropriate pedagogies while addressing a social issue in the classroom, especially when it is about promoting social harmony, peace, and tolerance.

I perceived ESD as an attempt to reorient the contemporary foundations of education to achieve the present goals and manage the future. It can be served as a tool to promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and peace among the youth (Akram, personal communication, April 07, 2021).

Several respondents recommended that understanding the wide-ranging sustainability issues and the necessary pedagogical skills, attitudes, and values can enhance educators’ readiness and confidence to teach the importance of social

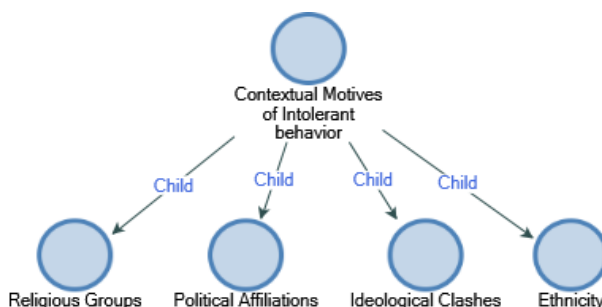
stability and sustainability of Pakistan’s progress (Ahmad, personal communication, March 25, 2021)

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that not all the respondents witnessed or reported (violent) extremism within an educational setting. Consequently, few engaged teacher educators negated the idea of the prevalence of extremism within educational institutes. For instance, ‘Ali’, a lecturer, mentioned that he never witnessed or experienced any violent or aggressive incident in his career. Since the respondent primarily served in Lahore-based co-education institutes, he believes gender exposure and inclusivity produce a sense of tolerance in a particular setting. The respondent further elucidated that incidents of violence and/or aggressive behavior can be mainly observed in male-dominated student institutions (personal communication, February 21, 2021). The mentioned observation was further supported by another respondent who had vast administrative and teaching experience in a female campus

As far as the main factors behind extremist tendencies or violent behavior are concerned, several teacher educators pointed towards religious, cultural, ethnic, and political differences within and between the students. The study participants believed that the aforementioned factors enable an environment where ‘us’ vs ‘them’ or identity-based bifurcations are manifested. Such polarization leads to ‘in-group’ vs ‘out-group’ aggressive, extreme, and/or hostile behavior(s) — marked by ethno-religious or cultural differences — thus impacting both in-campus environments and disturbing the overall societal fabric.

We are producing individuals, not a harmonious or cohesive society. Every individual believes he is ‘right’ and that others are ‘wrong’. This bifurcation is particularly causing extremist and intolerant behavior among the youth (Ayesha, personal communication, March 04, 2021).

Figure 6. NVivo Mind Map: Contextual motives of Intolerant behavior



Theme 2: Competence of Teacher Educators

Teacher educators often assume promoting social tolerance as a ‘personal agenda’, requiring personal commitment from an individual. Such an individual’s ‘self-driven’ agenda necessitates the consideration of ethical norms, guarding the value of morality, inter-faith dialogue, and inclusivity. One of the most important attributes of a learning environment is the influence that teachers impart on their students. Most teacher educators favored the view that teachers’ professionalism, commitment, involvement, and way of interacting with students are the critical factors in

facilitating or hindering the student's psychological and learning outcomes. For instance, 'Ahmed', a lecturer, expressed his views as,

Students learn what they see, not what they have been told. They observe the practices of their teachers, not their words. Intolerant and impatient behavior leads to strong adverse effects on students' personalities, and they depict the same in their real-life situations (Ahmad, personal communication, April 05, 2021).

Theme 3: Institutional Support

ESD Content and Social Tolerance within Teacher Education

The data indicates that the content(s) of the curriculum concerning sustainable development and its social pillar needs greater adoption. Furthermore, there is a dire need for reorienting and reorganization of the embedded content, which can help in promoting positive behavioral change. Thus, empowering students to attain sustainable development. Specific issues which are included in ESD content are peace, cultural diversity, human rights, gender equality, good citizenship, and respect. Nevertheless, they reported that the social pillar of sustainable development receives significant attention in teacher education. Respondents further highlighted a greater need to create political awareness among pre-service teachers.

Therefore, it is pivotal to improve the 'sustainability' aspect of pedagogy which involves teaching and learning social dimensions of sustainable development (and related-SDGs) (see, e.g., SDG 4 'quality education'). Similarly, the data indicates that the social aspects of 'sustainability' must not be mobilized as isolated curricular elements; rather, they should be implemented throughout the educational program.

Policies and Plan of Actions

During an interview with a senior educationist, it was revealed that the Government of Pakistan is planning to develop a comprehensive education plan — i.e., the '2030 Agenda' (Hussain, 2018; Nadia, personal communication, February 2021). While keeping socio-geographical and cultural diversity as integral components, the Agenda 2030 ensures inclusive and accessible education throughout society. Another respondent, 'Fiaz', an associate professor, mentioned that several developments concerning education reforms have occurred at the policy level; however, there is still a significant gap hindering the effective and necessary engagement of ESD into teacher education (personal communication, 2021). Respondents also illuminated that Pakistan's Educational Policy implemented by the Ministry of Education has yet to understand the significance of the education sector in promoting social tolerance, cohesion, harmony, responsible citizenship, and a collaborative approach. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to observe that the teacher educators welcomed the idea of ESD and the promotion of social tolerance.

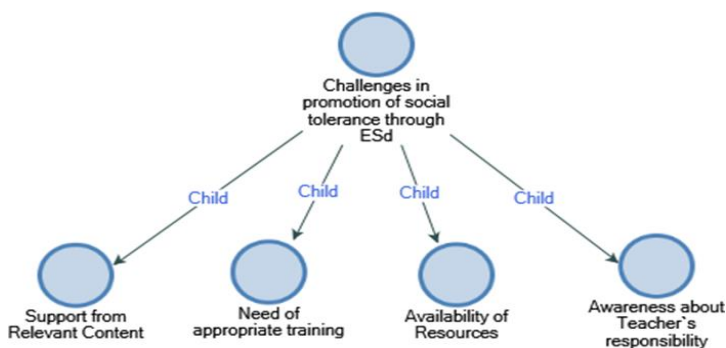
Theme 4: Challenges Confronted by Teacher Educators.

As discussed earlier, considering the diverse Pakistani society (in terms of ethnicity, language, gender, religion, and political affiliation), the role of the teacher must not be confined to mere academic subject contents. Instead, it is important to expand the role of teacher — (both in-service and pre-service) — in a manner that effectively shapes future citizenship; hence, performing as an active agent towards achieving

sustainable society and/or development. A crucial step to enable this process would be developing skilled human resources, which can further facilitate the important social change through education and providing training *within* teacher education.

With respect to the ESD, respondents emphasized that the framework has a great potential to create many new opportunities. However, it is crucial to consider that ESD may expose the education sector to unexpected multifaceted problems and challenges. According to ‘Ayesha’, some of the key challenges confronted by the teacher educators include “less availability of resources, lack of institutional expertise, lack of departmental interest, and poor institutional linkage of education with sustainable development and promotion of social tolerance” (personal communication, March 04, 2021) (See figure 7). Consequently, a teacher must be well equipped with pedagogical and psychological techniques to deal with the challenges emanating from ethno-religiosity, political disagreements, or other forms of identity-based discrimination and/or marginalization.

Figure 7. Nvivo Mind: Challenges in promotion of social tolerance through ESD



Discussion and Conclusion

The paper aimed to investigate the contribution of teacher educators in promoting social tolerance through ESD. In recent years, the concept of education via sustainable development has taken significant importance in preventing extremism and violence within educational institutions. The research inquiry identified the teacher educators’ perceptions and experiences regarding the existing tolerance level in pre-service teachers. In addition, the presented analysis identified several factors which create a conducive environment within which the phenomenon of (violent) extremism gets rooted. Diverse religious views, ethnic differences, gender discrimination, socio-political associations and differences have all been major contributors to such extremism in educational institutes. It is also identified that the proportion of aggressive and intolerant behavior is greater in institutions where male students are higher than female students. This lends credence to Gidengil and Everitt (2003) assertion that women are often thought to be more nurturing and social than men and thus more tolerant. Reorienting the education sector to attain sustainable-peaceful societies is crucial to deal with such tendencies.

According to Ferreira et al. (2007), teacher education programs should incorporate ESD philosophy, content, and activities to the point where ESD becomes embedded in all policies and practices. The findings of the current study also consider

ESD a valid and critically important field. It provides many opportunities for building a more peaceful and tolerant society and comes with new and often unexpected challenges and problems for teacher educators. In this regard, teacher educators identified the real challenges for ESD, such as lack of policy directions, necessary support, and resources,

The paper also highlighted a virtual absence of ESD in national education systems. Topics such as peace, tolerance, human rights, and citizenship are just a few examples that need to be an integral part of the education system and/or curriculum: as a national priority. As far as the current policy orientation is concerned, several guidelines and legislative frameworks related to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) have been approved and promulgated at the national level. Similarly, Pakistan's Education Policy (2009) also directly emphasizes social tolerance, cohesion, harmony, responsible citizenship, and a collaborative approach (Khizar et al., 2019). However, as Kalsoom and Khanam (2017) advocated, teacher education programs must assist pre-service teachers in becoming ESD educators. The analysis suggests that current teacher education standards and curricula are only marginally aligned with suggested ESD content, processes, and learning outcomes. Hence, it is argued that the limited focus on ESD is one of the main reasons for not providing a sustainable development-based framework that can promote social tolerance through teacher education programs to attain sustainable and peaceful societies.

The paper also suggests that teachers education should maintain a critical and contextualized approach to (violent) extremism and related practices in educational institutes. Taking this into consideration, it is important to establish organizations that can deliver teacher training programs with particular emphasis on ESD. Furthermore, the acceptance and tolerance for different religions, ethnicities and political perspectives (as the root causes of extremism) must be developed through effective pedagogy and content of teacher education institutions. In terms of institutional cooperation, the National Education Policy, National Curriculum Framework, and UNESCO should encourage cross-sectoral collaborations and partnerships to devise an educational setup that can foster social tolerance and inclusivity within and among the societies.

Although this research was primarily concerned with the teacher educators, it is essential to analyze the perspective of students within the Pakistan-based education institutes located in Pakistan. Similarly, there is a greater need to elucidate other mediating factors through longitudinal approaches to improve ESD in teacher education.

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