

Building Resilience through Peace Education: Perspectives of Teacher Educators about Pre-Service Teacher Education

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Abstract

The key objective of this research was to establish an evidence-based study about current teaching practices, focusing on the critical elements of teaching methods used in pre-service education programs that can build resilience against (violent) extremism. One of the principles underpinning training young teachers is to help prepare and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to practice peace education. The qualitative data was collected from teachers engaged in the education programs. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Wah Cantonment, and six major cities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, Pakistan. The study argues that to ensure resilient teachers and trainers, the Bachelors of Education degree (B.Ed) program needs to offer specialist skills and a theoretical understanding of peace, civic, and tolerance education. Such a result-orientated focus can enhance the effectiveness of the existing education programs in Pakistan vis-à-vis resilience towards (violent) extremism.

Keywords

Resilience, violent extremism, peace education, tolerance, teacher education, Pakistan

Introduction

Resilience can be defined as the ability to recover from adversity. Another important to note is that resilience is a process, rather characteristic or a feature, which enables an individual or a society to recover through positive adoption from any adversity or event (e.g., Wosnitza et al., 2018). According to American Psychological Association (APA), “resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands” (n.d.).

Resilience, as a concept, has a multidisciplinary presence and application. Notably, it has been widely applied in the academic fields (of social) psychology, sociology, risk and disaster management, and security studies. However, there is a

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greater need to explicate the potential role of resilience in education studies (as a discipline). In particular, allowing the scope of resilience to be cross-fertilized with civic education is indeed promising. Civic education studies the rights and responsibilities related to the exercise of citizenship. It enables citizens to be aware of their roles in society and helps them be involved in the societal and political decision-making system.

Furthermore, civic education provides a multidisciplinary approach by facilitating the learners to recognize the democratic attitude and promote diversity. Inarguably, recognizing diversity is an essential step toward sustainable peace, thus, serving as a building block of resilience (Fedorenko & Sharanova, 2019; Kerr, 1999). For instance, Peace Direct, an international organization working for sustainable peace across the globe, contends that “peace education activities promote the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help people either to prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflicts peacefully, or create social conditions conducive to peace” (n.d.). Therefore, peace education plays an important role in building resilience in children and young adults against the effects of trauma and violent extremism (Kimhi et al., 2017). The main focus of this study is to assess pre-service teachers’ training in Pakistan vis-à-vis civic, peace, and tolerance education (i.e., peace education). The teacher’s training develops essential abilities and approaches for dealing with issues concerning peace education both inside and outside the schools. In doing so, the study explores the concept, methods, and curriculum of peace education. The main arguments of the study are based on the opinion and feedback received from the teacher educators about the inculcation of elements of civic, peace, and tolerance (as peace education) in the curriculum and pedagogy of the B.Ed elementary education program in Pakistan. The paper further determines the potential integration of said components for building resilience through pre-service teacher education. While elucidating the policies, programs, and interventions, the article explicates how teachers in Pakistan can play a role in peacebuilding through perception building and social unity (e.g., Masood-ul-Hassan et al., 2014).

Conceptual Understanding of Peace Education

Recently, peace education has received significant attention, primarily driven by the emergence of contemporary educational dilemmas, reflecting the importance of peace education and the teachers’ challenges. In particular, teachers are a vital component of any education system, and quality teaching is a prerequisite for the success of any educational program or activity. A broader perspective on the promotion of sustainable peace and tolerance often focuses on the teachers’ role in fostering social skills, responsible citizenship, and skills for sustainable livelihoods, challenging gender inequalities and overcoming individual and societal difficulties (Novelli & Sayed, 2016; Leach & Humphreys, 2007). In this vein, peace education in classrooms aims at equipping students with the necessary knowledge and attitudes to promote respect, tolerance, participation, and cooperation. Several scholars have argued that aspects related to peace education need to be added to the instructional curricula of all educational institutions as early as preschool to promote a peace culture (e.g., Schulz et al., 2018).

In addition, peace education can foster respect for human rights; improve democratic values, social justice, and solidarity among people and nations. It further promotes conflict resolution through dialogue and develops empathy for individuals and nations. Indeed, teachers play a crucial role in achieving these values. Consequently, teachers should be equipped with universal morals, such as freedom,

justice, human rights, gender equality, tolerance, and respect for the right to live. They should also develop an understanding of peace and a desire for an internalized peaceful culture (Wulandari & Murdiono, 2018; Snauwaert, 2020).

History also plays a vital role in peace education for developing or discouraging a culture and environment of peace. History education is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool that can alter the dynamics of identity-based conflicts and promote mutual understanding and reconciliation between conflicting parties (Korostelina, 2013). In this regard, teachers can play an important role by challenging existing prejudices, stereotypes, and justifications for conflicts by providing alternative interpretations, multiple perspectives, and narratives of positive intergroup relations and cooperation. Peace education on history (as a theme) targets rudimentary opinions by reducing biases toward the out-groups, developing shared perceptions and identifying the commonalities among diverse groups (Ndabaga, 2020; Breidlid, 2019). Therefore, teachers can create a culture of peace through changes in perceptions about in-group and out-group identity and by creating awareness about the sensitivities of history.

However, teacher stress has increased in recent years internationally (Day & Gu, 2013; Katz et al., 2018), leading to burnout and attrition, particularly for early career teachers and teachers working in urban and/or rural (disadvantaged) schools. The economic, academic, and psychological costs of teacher burnout and attrition are significant as it is directly linked to lower student achievement and negative school climates (Brunetti, 2006; Ellison & Mays-Woods, 2019). The resilience in teachers can be nurtured by the intellectual, social, and organizational environments in which teachers work and live, rather than being simply a personal attribute or trait determined by nature.

Resilient teachers are those who do not compromise their professional duties and keep giving their best despite of many challenges they are facing in their lives (Day & Gu, 2009; Flores, 2020). On the other hand, several scholars argue that resilience in teachers is not only the capability to bounce back in extremely adversarial circumstances, but it is the ability of the teachers for everyday resilience which enables them to sustain their commitment and effectiveness in responding positively to the unavoidable uncertainties characterized by their professional lives (Day & Gu, 2013; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014; Bikar et al., 2021). Therefore, resilient teachers can adapt to multiple circumstances and improve their skills in conflicting situations (Ju & Fan, 2021) and thus can quickly and skillfully reduce puzzling situations or repetitive obstacles. Not only do resilient teachers persevere, but they also maintain job satisfaction and obligation to the profession they have earned. Because resilience is a multidimensional process achieved through a blend of individual and ecological features, thus, environmental conditions can affect life in different ways (Wright et al., 2019). To impart effective peace education, teacher educators must teach appropriate and healthy ways to cope with learning pressures and endurance. The challenges faced by teachers today are becoming increasingly complex. Moreover, in underdeveloped societies, teachers are underpaid and undervalued, so they need to be provided with a comfortable working environment and techniques to cope with existing challenges (Klusmann et al., 2016; Setiadi et al., 2017; Hasan & Baskey, 2019).

Research by teachers in practice has revealed that what they consider as 'discussions' in their classrooms is giving answers to the questions asked by the students. Such discussions lack any aspects of critical thinking. An actual discussion is not only based on knowledge but also covers diverse topics that can change the

orientation of any pre-existing reality. In any democratic setting, the input of public opinion is paramount to the decision-making process. Therefore, any political topic discussed in classrooms shall also be within the ambit of nation-building and, more importantly, result-oriented (Parker, 2003; Gu, 2017). Such activities and classroom-based engagements shape opinions and encourage young people to promote such practices within their communities. Hence, educators widely propagate that students should be actively involved in problem-solving activities and strategies concerned with tolerance and civic values (Ersoy, 2014; Damico, 2020).

It is equally important to discuss factors contributing to teachers' resilience and their significance in preventing a culture of conflict and violence within the schools and society. Helping pre-service teachers to explore strategies to respond to challenges in the supportive learning environment of pre-service learning is important to building strength and resilience for teachers' careers (Mampane, 2014; Balaei et al., 2019):

- *Soft skills*: providing better education, language training, and interventions designed to encourage soft skills. Innovation and entrepreneurship provide better economic opportunities and enhanced performance at work. Soft skills refer to the skills, competencies, and characteristics pertaining to personality, attitude, and behavior instead of formal or technical knowledge. The skills cover proficiencies (such as communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, and leadership) and are considered essential, especially for teachers, as they stand at the very heart of the teaching and learning process (Dogan, 2021).
- *Civic education*: pre-service educational programs that encourage debate & dialogue and promote different learning perspectives (such as cultures and beliefs). Civic education equips teachers and students with the necessary practical application tools and thinking skills to facilitate their own learning. It identifies and accomplishes personal goals and contributes to the overall society. Furthermore, civic education provides a clear path to student empowerment and promotes democratic accountability and good governance.
- *Sociocultural factors*: providing teachers with an environment that promotes participation in a wide variety of institutional relationships, including shared learning relationships with peers. It promotes mutuality, empowerment, and (Jordan, 2006). Similarly, there is growing recognition that pre-service teacher education programs should integrate technology into their curricula to ensure teachers are adequately prepared for the use of technology in teaching practices; hence, transforming social practices.

Although resilience may seem intrinsic, it can be established and enriched through direct action. These actions can take the form of proactive support from educational organizations around the practice of teaching and learning. Ideally, a resilient education system continues to provide safe, equitable access to quality education services that help reinforce or grow learners' literacy and social skills in times of conflict or crisis. When education is risk-informed, conflict-sensitive, and equitable, it strengthens resilience at the following multiple levels:

- Education can support and strengthen social capital, an important safety net for individuals and households. Completing a primary or secondary education raises the human capital of individuals, a critical foundation for resilient people, households, and communities. Through education, people are better able to adapt

or transform their behaviors and livelihoods owing to increased access to socio-economic capital (such as employment opportunities, access to information and system, exposure to democratic values and understanding of human rights) (World Bank, 2018).

- Education strengthens trust, tolerance, and empathy between and among various communities, improving levels of civic engagement and increasing civic skills for citizens to support inclusive institutions (Reyes, 2013; World Bank, 2018; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2019).
- Education offers opportunities within and outside the classroom for intra- and inter-group dialogue and cooperation. Such opportunities are essential to develop mechanisms for strengthening community relationships and trust (Shah et al., 2018).
- Higher education levels for mothers strongly influence the likelihood of children being fully vaccinated and reduce child mortality and growth stunting (Fernald et al., 2012; Forshaw et al., 2017; Sabates et al., 2010; Berke et al., 2021). Furthermore, education can improve women's empowerment and gender equality, which are strong predictors of whether households can escape and remain out of poverty in the face of shocks and stressors (Sen & Mukherjee, 2014).
- Disaster risk education is critical in strengthening community knowledge about responding to natural disasters, climate change, health emergencies, and future armed conflict (Amri et al., 2017). With regards, education can strengthen the social, emotional and soft skills, enhancing the abilities of individuals to recover from such shocks (Ibrahim et al., 2017).

Methodology

This research is phenomenological in nature as it is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individuals and emphasizes the importance of personal experiences and interpretation. Phenomenological research also allows flexible methods of data collection. For instance, Seamon (2000) suggests that “the best phenomenological methods are those that allow the human experience to arise in a rich, unstructured, multidimensional way” (p. 163). For this research, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The study sample comprised 15 teacher educators (see Table 1). A Random sampling technique was used in the selection of the sample.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher educators in different universities. The interview guide was limited to 16 questions related to (i) peace education (ii) and building future teachers' resilience. Open-ended questions were developed so respondents could elaborate on details, express their thoughts, and offer personal opinions based on experience. The research team personally visited all the selected institutes for data collection.

Table 1: Sample size of the study

<i>No</i>	<i>Institutes</i>	<i>No. of Teacher Educators</i>
1	Kohat University of Science and Technology Kohat	02
2	Malakand University, Malakand	01
3	University of Sawat, Sawat	02
4	University of Haripur, Haripur	02
5	University of Hazara, Mansehra	02
6	University of Peshawar, Peshawar	01
7	International Islamic University, Islamabad	03
8	Sir Syed College of Education & Professional Training, Wah Cantt.	01
9	Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi.	01
	<i>Total</i>	<i>15</i>

Bearing in mind the ethical considerations of the research, no potential conflict of interest was identified or reported by the researchers. The fieldwork was conducted after the ethical approval from the university administration. Participants were assured that any information that could reveal the identity of the respondents would not be shared with anyone. All the research participants were provided with the necessary details about the project; however, only those respondents who agreed to participate were engaged. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis to understand, describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of teacher educators in particular circumstances (Lochmiller, 2021). After reading through the data-set(s) relevant patterns were identified, which further helped to derive different themes resonating with the research objectives, as discussed below.

Results

Based on the collected data, informing the main research questions and objectives concerning perspectives of teacher educators regarding the contribution of peace education to resilience in Pakistan, the following sections present the main empirically-driven themes.

Developing a ‘Peace’ Environment

Most respondents believed that peace education promotes knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help people avoid conflicts and create a (social) environment that is fundamentally conducive to peace. In particular, education provides an opportunity to unite different groups and identities in a community-level dialogue. Such an environment typically includes civil society groups, schools, local community members and elders, and the media. Respondents also stated that education plays a central role in helping people to develop more peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive societies. Similarly, peace education provides people with the understanding, skills, and values they need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of contemporary times and helps to become more resilient, both at the self and societal level.

Diverse Roles of Teachers Beyond Subject-specific knowledge

The teacher educators agreed that educational institutions' role is not limited to improving social and economic values but also teaching the lesson of harmony, tolerance, equality, and justice. In this regard, the roles of family, religious institutes, the media, and civil society are crucial for creating a peaceful society. However, schools assume separate and exclusive responsibilities for the development of responsible citizens. According to several respondents, the training mentioned above in schools should commence in the early years and continue throughout the learning process. Nevertheless, few respondents suggested combining peace education in practice by teaching people to think critically. According to the respondents, such an approach equips the learners with the means to resolve conflicts rationally with an actionable plan or strategy for peace.

Peace Education as a Separate Subject

Most respondents believed peace education should be introduced as a separate subject in the prospective teacher education curriculum throughout Pakistan. This subject can also help create awareness at the self and community levels. However, the exposure can be further extended to several important environmental and cultural factors in building a peaceful and just society. Similarly, several respondents suggested that peace education must be incorporated at all levels and courses of study at the B.Ed level program. Furthermore, the objective of providing peace education training to prepare pre-service students also needs to be added to pre-service education programs.

Understanding Resilience and Wellbeing through Education

Peace education plays a significant role in building resilience in individuals (and specifically children) against the effects of trauma and violence. It enables individuals and society to resist violence and recover from the crisis. With regards, the peacebuilding approach in education is based on providing the students with the needed skills and knowledge to achieve change on both the individual and societal levels which would further allow them to face and overcome the constantly escalating internal and external threats. Hence, resilience manifests through an identified cycle of change (Juncos & Josphe, 2020).

Respondents further shared that through the professional education system, the teachers can interact with the students closely and to know them better. The teacher-student interaction additionally allows an opportunity to develop effective teacher-student-parent communication. Such an arrangement or teachers' orientation not only offers an opportunity or safe environment to the students for self-reflection(s) but also enables them to identify any undesirable pattern(s) amongst the students which need attention for preventive-based interventions.

Education for Intercultural Understanding

Peace education and related content and/or activities ensure inclusivity. It promotes a sense of respect, empathy, and understanding among students (Ben-Porath, 2005). In this vein, several respondents agreed that in countries such as Pakistan (i.e., ethnoreligious and highly polarized), peace education has a pivotal role. More importantly, peace education is necessary to develop and prepare the future generation of Pakistan that will continue to encounter ethnoreligious and sectarian-based in-group vs out-group conflicts (at the broader societal level). It will provide

them with an alternate view of society, i.e. based on peace, human rights, and democratic values.

Challenges: Peace Education in Pre-service Teacher Education

Respondents also identified several challenges that inhibit the implementation of peace education in prospective teacher education in Pakistan. According to the respondents, there is a noticeable reluctance at the institutional administrative level to adopt unconventional approaches to teaching peace education. Furthermore, the respondents also highlighted the lack of experts in the field of peace education who can develop a result-oriented strategy and curriculum. Owing to the mentioned lack of expertise, developing and introducing peace education as an independent discipline for educators has become very challenging. The respondents believed that, indeed, there are some areas where the curriculum focuses on some of the aspects pertaining to peace and tolerance; however, overall, there is a narrow focus on the subject for the pre-service teachers' curriculum. Another critical challenge identified by the respondents was the reluctance of the teachers to engage with sensitive issues within the classroom environment. For instance, it was stated that religion is a sensitive topic, and establishing tolerance and peace within the religion requires ample religious understanding (epistemologically) and necessary skills. It was mentioned that the current peace education is based on western experience; hence, highly decontextualized. Consequently, there is a greater need to produce indigenous peace education content that resonates with the contextual realities and dynamics.

Concluding Remarks

This paper elucidated the idea of resilience-building through peace education from the perspectives of teacher educators about pre-service teacher education. It has been argued that peace education aims to provide the skills required to acknowledge inclusivity and become a functioning and responsible citizen. In addition, it creates a sense of citizenship and promotes human rights and democratic values. In an educational set-up, active learning strategies, debates, discussions, and co-curricular activities are a way forward to peace education.

The research aimed to look specifically at teaching methods from teacher educators' perspectives, and it analyzed the existing modules and methods that can contribute to building resilience through peace education. With this in mind, several factors have been identified that assist in building resilience in prospective teachers. The study identified several contents related to peace education being taught B.Ed degree program level (such as acknowledgment and rejection of violence, conflict resolution via conversation, critical awareness of injustice and social justice, and imaginative understanding of peace). The primary purpose of these subjects is to help students acquire skills for non-violent conflict resolution and practice them to develop a peaceful and resilient society. Nevertheless, there is a greater need to establish a separate independent and contextualized course on peace education at the degree program level.

Furthermore, teacher educators must adopt a holistic approach to understand the root causes of violence and injustice in society. To this end, integration, implementation, and practice of peace education must be appropriately and continuously evaluated to ensure effectiveness. Attention should also be paid to teachers' training to improve their necessary skills, methods, and knowledge for result-oriented peace education. Lastly, there is a greater need to revise the existing

curriculum of prospective teacher education to integrate concepts related to peace education and devise a context-specific curriculum.

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