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PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS MADRASSA SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Abstract

Madrassa system of education with long history is providing religious education in Pakistan. For some students, the only source of formal education is Madrassas, while they are serving supplementary for others. In the current criticism by western media, the perceptions of students towards Madrassa system of education carry a great significance.

For this study a sample of 500 students was randomly selected and data were collected through survey method, questionnaire and focus group discussion tools. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Non parametric test chi-square was used for statistical analysis.

It was found that students are satisfied with Madrassa system of education. The Madrassa system is better than Government system of education. Madrassa system of education does not provide job opportunities equal modern education system. Madrassa system of education does not impart education to face global challenges. The students are satisfied with curriculum and teachers of Madrassa system of education. The students urged that Madrassa system of education should be integrated with modern system of education and pointed out that government is not serious to integrate Madrassa system of education with modern system of education. Madrassa organizers oppose the integration of Madrassa system of education with modern system of education due to communication gaps and misunderstanding. Madrassa system of education is peace loving and hates extremism. The suggestions are presented at the end of the paper.

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Introduction

Perception is a thinking process in which learns use their senses to notice and understand the world around or environment. The perceptions of students play a vital role in understanding the Madrassa system of education. A large number of Muslim students is enrolled in Madrassas all over the world. Madrassas are the only source of education for many students, especially poor students. Besides, some students acquire partial education from Madrassas to build their religious foundation.

The word Madrassa means a school in Arabic language. It is a building where Islamic or religious teaching learning takes place (American Heritage Dictionary of English language, 2005). Ahmed (2009) describes that “traditionally, Madrassas are Islamic learning institutions, aimed at building a generation of Islamic scholars and leaders.

The word ‘Madrassa’ means ‘center of learning’ in Arabic. They provide free religious education, boarding and lodging” (p. 2). Furthermore, Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, and Zajonc (2005) state that they have their own curriculum and they impart religious education without following the curriculum designed by education Ministry in Pakistan (p. 10).

Madrassa education system is one of the three separate education systems working in Pakistan. Private, public and Madrassa education systems are running side by side. This has been pointed out in National Education Policy 2009. The policy (2009) further recognized that three separate education systems with separate curriculum have created many problems for the students. Moreover, based on political and sectarian grounds, there are five separate kinds of Madrassas with conflicting doctrinal dissimilarities in Pakistan.

Riaz (2005) believes that Pakistani Madrassa education system is highly criticized in western countries since 11th September, 2001 incident. To them Madrassas promote terrorism in the name of jihad. There is warfare training. Haqqani (2002) adds that the most of western writers connect Pakistani Madrassas with terrorism and

extremism. To them these educational institutions spread militancy. Moulton (2008) proposes that “since 2001 these Islamic religious schools have become a concern to some in the West, largely for political reasons. The image of Madrassas spread through the press is often negative and has spurred the international community to do something” (p. 1).

Currently, Pakistani government has also found few weak areas in Madrassa system of education. To government, some of the Madrassas are deviated from their educational role and found involved in anti-state activities. Bukhari and Rahman (2006) also suggest that educational role in Pakistani religious institutions should be reformed. To overcome this problem, government has brought many changes in the law to reform Madrassa system of education. In this regard government has taken certain initiatives to modernize the Madrassa education system to bring them into main stream.

The government has put all efforts to modernize the Madrassa education system but failed to get all Madrassas registered. A large number of Madrassas is still unregistered. Government has expended a huge amount on the planning to connect Madrassa system of education with mainstream education system.

Yet majority of Madrassa organizers are unwilling to get government affiliation. Now the question raises where are the gapes -whether the gaps are on the part of government or on the part of Madrassa organizers. Realizing such communication gaps between government and Madrassas organizers, the research has been conducted to fill gaps.

Research questions

1. What are the perceptions of students toward Madrassa system of education?
2. To what extent students support the mainstreaming of Madrassa system of education?

3. To what extent government is serious to bring Madrassa education system into mainstream?
4. To what extent Madrassa organizers are serious to get Madrassa system of education registered?
5. What are the obstacles in the way of mainstreaming of Madrassa education system and how can these gaps be filled?

Review of literature

Criticism on Madrassa system of education is not a new issue. It was severely criticized by British rulers and native Hindus before partition. Currently, the intensity of criticism is increased due changing interest of USA in Asia.

Madrassa system of education has a long history. Moulton (2008) states that "Madrassas are at least a thousand years old" (p. 2). Madrassas have played a very important role regarding the education of Muslims. They were used as learning colleges in Muslim world since long.

They imparted religious and secular education equally in past. Moulton (2008) further describes that "During the Mughal period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Islamic culture flourished in India, Madrassas trained the intellectual and bureaucratic elite" (p. 7). Many educationists like teachers, doctors, administrators, judges and lawyers have received their education from such Madrassas. But at present several scholars believe that "Madrassa education is limited to religious scripts and teachings of Islam" (<http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>).

Since independence, the rapid growth of Madrassa system of education has been observed in Pakistan. There were only one hundred eighty nine Madrassas at the time of independence of Pakistan. In 2002, the number increased to ten thousand and in 2008, the number of Madrassas reached to fourteen thousand (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>).

The rapid growth of religious organizations has given rise to ideological differences dividing Madrassas into different groups or categories. Currently, various kinds of Madrassas are running in Pakistan. Ahmed (2009) points out that "today, there are five distinct types of Madrassas in Pakistan, divided along sectarian and political line" (p. 2). Rahman (2004) adds that there are five boards with different ideologies in Pakistan to organize Madrassa system. Deobandi school of thought encompasses 70% of them.

At present Madrassa system of education is facing a very harsh criticism. USA has alleged that Pakistani Madrassas are involved in the attack on USA on eleven September 2001. Western countries and media have targeted all the Madrassas of Pakistan. Ahmed (2009) identifies that western "media propaganda has reinforced the link between terrorism and Pakistan's Madrassas, targeting all Madrassas" (p. 5). They have connected all Madrassas with terrorism. To them, Madrassas in Pakistan generate and train terrorists. They train the terrorists and provide funds to fighters.

Ahmed (2009) points out that Madrassa system of education was very peaceful in past. There was no sign of violence in those religious organizations. The violence for the first time entered in Madrassas during Russia war against Afghanistan. Some Madrassas were motivated, funded and pressurized by USA though Pakistani government to take part in the war. In this way some Madrassas started giving training to Afghanistan supporters to fight against Russia (p. 3). The state supported Madrassas used to train the students and sent them to Afghanistan to take part in the war against Russia.

Ahmed (2009) traces the entrance of violence into Madrassas during that period. He describes that "the origin of religious militancy in Pakistan 'is' traced back to Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. USA needed the Islamic fundamentalists to 'fight' against Soviets in Afghanistan, and thus provided substantial funding to Pakistan, entrusted to its leaders at that time" (pp. 3-4). Before that period Pakistani Madrassas system of education was very peaceful all over the world.

Realizing the pressure of USA in 2001, the Government of Pakistan passed two laws in 2001 to control and register the Madrassas. The law embodied the registration procedure, curriculum standardization, rules and regulation Pakistani Madrassas. Government of Pakistan has merely passed the law but not been able to get it implemented.

The wave of uncertainty and lack of proper communication between government representatives and Madrassa organizers are perhaps the prominent reasons that majority of Madrassa organizers are unwilling to get their organizations affiliated and registered. The most of the Madrassas working in Pakistan are still unregistered.

Methodology

A survey method has been used in this study. The population of the study is all the students of Pakistan, while the access population is all the students enrolled in different Madrassas in Hyderabad. The random sampling technique has been used for the selection of the sample. For this study, a sample of 500 Madrassa students was brought under study. The instruments used for the collection of data were closed ended questionnaire and focus group discussion. The data were collected in two phases.

In the first phase the data were collected through questionnaire. In the second phase a group discussion was held to discuss pros and cons of each item of the questionnaire. Each item of the questionnaire was discussed in detail. Students tried to justify their choice logically. There was the exchange of argument between groups supporting and opposing the item. Every student talked rationally to support the argument. Finally, the collected data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Non parametric test Chi-square had been used for item analysis.

*Analysis of findings***Table 1****Q1. Are you satisfied with Madrassa system of education?**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	320	166.7	153.3	64.0
No	150	166.7	-16.7	30.0
Undecided	30	166.7	-136.7	6.0
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	254.800			

Analysis

The table 1 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 254.800, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that students are satisfied with Madrassa system of education.

Table 2**Q2. Do you think that Madrassa system of education is better than Government system of education?**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	351	166.7	184.3	70.2
No	93	166.7	-73.7	18.6
Undecided	56	166.7	-110.7	11.2
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	309.916			

Analysis

The table 2 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 309.916, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that according to students, Madrassa system of education is better than Government system of education.

Table 3

Q3. Do you think that Madrassa system of education provides job opportunities equal modern education?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	86	166.7	-80.7	17.2
No	291	166.7	124.3	58.2
Undecided	123	166.7	-43.7	24.6
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	143.236			

Analysis

The table 3 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 143.236, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The H_0 is rejected with conclusion that according to students Madrassa system of education does not provide job opportunities equal modern education.

Table 4

Q4. Do you think that Madrassa system of education imparts good education to face global challenges?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	172	166.7	5.3	34.4
No	313	166.7	146.3	62.6
Undecided	15	166.7	-151.7	3.0
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	266.668			

Analysis

The table 4 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 266.668, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The H_0 is rejected with conclusion that according to students Madrassa system of education does not impart good education to face global challenges.

Table 5**Q5. Are you satisfied with curriculum of Madrassa system of education?**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	281	166.7	114.3	56.2
No	99	166.7	-67.7	19.8
Undecided	120	166.7	-46.7	24.0
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	118.972			

Analysis

The table 5 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 118.972, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that students are satisfied with curriculum of Madrassa system of education.

Table 6**Q6. Are you satisfied with teachers of Madrassa system of education?**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	280	166.7	113.3	56.0
No	191	166.7	24.3	38.2
Undecided	29	166.7	-137.7	5.8
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	194.332			

Analysis

The table 6 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 194.332, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that students are satisfied with teachers of Madrassa system of education.

Table 7

Q7. Do you think that Madrassa system of education should be integrated with modern system of education?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	409	166.7	242.3	81.8
No	85	166.7	-81.7	17.0
Undecided	6	166.7	-160.7	1.2
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	547.252			

Analysis

The table 7 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 547.252, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that according to students Madrassa system of education should be integrated with modern system of education.

Table 8

Q8. Do you think that government is serious to integrate Madrassa system of education with modern system of education?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	162	166.7	-4.7	32.4
No	247	166.7	80.3	49.4
Undecided	91	166.7	-75.7	18.2
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	73.204			

Analysis

The table 8 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 73.204, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that according to students, government is not serious to integrate Madrassa system of education with modern system of education.

Table 9

Q9. Do you think that Madrassa organizers oppose the integration of Madrassa system of education with modern system of education?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	271	166.7	104.3	54.2
No	171	166.7	4.3	34.2
Undecided	58	166.7	-108.7	11.6
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	136.276			

Analysis

The table 9 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 136.276, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that according to students Madrassa organizers oppose the integration of Madrassa system of education with modern system of education.

Table 10

Q10. Do you think that Madrassa system of education promote extremism?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Frequency %
Yes	122	166.7	-44.7	24.4
No	337	166.7	170.3	67.4
Undecided	41	166.7	-125.7	8.2
Total	500			100.0
Chi-Square	280.804			

Analysis

The table 10 confirms that observed value of Chi-Square is 280.804, that is greater than tabulated value 5.99 at 0.05 alpha with 2 df. The Ho is rejected with conclusion that according to students, Madrassa system of education does not promote extremism.

Interpretation of results

The majority of students are satisfied with Madrassa system of education. They believe that standard and quality of education is better in Madrassas than Government institutions. Moreover, Madrassas provide not only free education but also lodging and boarding. The majority of students belonged to poor families. Their parents were unable to afford their education in private organizations. Besides, they were not satisfied with Government organizations. To them, it is better to get education in Madrassas than government institutions. In Madrassas, the students are taught discipline, hardworking, honesty, truthfulness, obedience and the art of successful life, where as in government organizations they often learn cheating, lie, laziness, disobedience, hostility, chaos and dishonesty etc. The most of the students perceived the quality of teaching learning satisfactory in Madrassa system of education.

The students professed that job opportunities are comparatively less for Madrassa educated students. The students getting modern education or coming from government or private schools often get better jobs. They are comparatively more competitive in the job market. The government often changes and modifies the curriculum from time to time, meeting the demands of the market. In Madrassa system of education curriculum change is very negligible and that change is not made according to market challenges. Madrassa education system focuses more on life hereafter. This world is temporary and life hereafter is permanent and Madrassa education system focuses more on spiritual life and prepares students for life hereafter.

The students believed that proper emphasis has not been given on global challenges in Madrassa system of education. There is very rare use of modern technology in most of the Madrassas in Hyderabad. The students often learn through old methods from teachers. Teachers and books are the major sources of knowledge for students. They are not connected with world through internet. They are also not equipped with latest inventions and discoveries.

Although curriculum of Madrassa system of education is not according modern needs and job market, yet majority of students are satisfied with curriculum of Madrassa system of education. To them, curriculum of Madrassa system of education modifies the behavior of learners. The learners completing Madrassa education lead a simple but balance life. They act what they learn during their education process.

Students are satisfied with teachers of Madrassa system of education. They believe that though teachers are neither highly qualified nor paid high salary as found in government organizations, yet they are committed to follow the rules and regulations of Madrassas. Teachers are regular and punctual. They strictly follow the prescribed course outlines and schedule. They produce results as per aspirations of the organization.

The students eagerly urged that Madrassa system of education should be integrated with modern system of education. They wanted to see science and technology courses teaching learning in Madrassa system of education. To them, they are the only source of modern knowledge.

They open the windows of world. In order to compete they global world, they emphasized the merging of modern scientific subjects with religious subjects.

The students believe that government is not serious to integrate Madrassa system of education with modern system of education. They explained that every organization is working under the supervision of state. State can do what it wants. Madrassas are working in the state and following the constitution of Pakistan. If government had been serious, all the Madrassas would have registered and followed the guidelines of government. They further added that government perhaps has no proper plan to integrate the Madrassa system of education with modern system of education. If government had been serious, then no Madrassa would have been unregistered. The existence of majority of unregistered Madrassas shows the indifference of government.

Similarly, students further pointed out that Madrassa organizers also oppose the integration of Madrassa system of education with modern system of education. They argued that Madrassa organizers are not clear about the intention of government. The most of the Madrassas are running on the donations and funds provided by philanthropists, NGOs and such organizations. If they follow the government policies, then it will raise the expenditure and none is there to carry the extra burden. They run the Madrassa system of education with limited budget and funds.

Following government policies and introducing science and technology in Madrassa system of education requires qualified teachers with high salary. Who will pay such amount from limited budget? If government had ensured the provision of funds, competitive teachers and such other things necessary for teaching modern subjects, then Madrassa organizers would have no objection.

The most of the students believe Madrassa system of education is very peace loving and does not promote extremism. It is only propaganda by USA and other western countries to destroy this cadre of education for the sake of their own interest.

The majority of Muslim poor students acquires their education from these organizations and by propagating, western media want deprive such a great portion of the country from their basic right of education. They further argued that extremism may be on the part of freedom fighters and freedom fighters are not merely education from Madrassas.

Many freedom fighters have received their education from private and government organizations. There are many freedom fighters that have received their degrees from abroad.

They fight for their rights. The question is not whether they are right or wrong but question is Madrassa system of education should not be treated as being propagated.

Conclusion

The Madrassa system of education is working successfully in Pakistan along with private and public organizations. The students not only perceived the positive role of Madrassas but also called it better than government organizations. There are some areas where reforms are essential for Madrassa system of education, yet government's role to reform Madrassa system of education is dismal. There is communication gap and misunderstanding between government representatives and Madrassa organizers. The increasing enrollment and students' satisfaction from Madrassa system of education witness that Madrassas promote peace and condemn extremism.

Suggestions

1. Government should take serious efforts to own the Madrassa system of education.
2. The rules and regulation for the registration of Madrassas should be made easy and flexible.
3. The curriculum of Madrassa system should be modified from time to time to face global challenges.
4. Government should defend Madrassa system of education before western countries.
5. Government should take serious efforts regarding the integration of Madrassa system of education into mainstream.
6. Government officers should visit the Madrassas from time to time as they visit the public schools to check the working of Madrassas.
7. Government should provide funds to Madrassa system of education.

8. Government representatives should meet Madrassa organizers from time to time reduce communication gaps and misunderstanding.

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