The Role Of Education In Post-Conflict Peace Building: Learner Perspectives From Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the discourse and policy debate on the role of education as a tool for peace building by exploring its contribution to promoting peaceful coexistence in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan – a region with a long history of political instability and terrorism. The role of education in promoting long-term peace is examined from the perspective of learners. Education contributes significantly to the cognitive, emotional, and psychological development of learners. It is a tool that enables individuals to understand themselves and make meaning of their environment, which provides a foundation for social, political, economic, and cultural development. In achieving its aim, the paper adopts a qualitative approach. Participants included learners in Grade 9 to 12 who were selected from three public secondary schools in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Data were collected through open-ended semi-structured interviews and analyzed on the basis of grounded theory. The findings indicate that learners recognize the importance of education to peace building. The paper makes recommendations for the government at the national and local level to revisit their education strategy to incorporate an organized component of peace education in elementary and secondary schools in Pakistan.

Keywords: Education, Peace building, Peace, Positive Peace, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Conflict, Post-conflict

1.0 INTRODUCTION
1.1 Background of the Study

Education is a basic human right that is legally guaranteed for everyone. It is essential for human, economic, and social development and is fundamental for the achievement of sustainable development and lasting peace. The global initiative of Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have achieved tremendous progress towards the attainment of universal primary education within the last two decades (UNICEF, 2017). In 2015, the total primary and secondary enrolment rate in the developing world reaching 91 percent. Literacy rates have also increased dramatically since 2000, while more girls are accessing basic and tertiary education than ever before. However, in spite of these tremendous achievements, progress in conflict areas has been slow. Globally, over 27 million children of school-going age are out of school in conflict-affected countries (UNICEF, 2021). Moreover, 25 percent of the 109.2 million children living in conflict zones miss out on their education (UNICEF, 2021).

Ethnic conflicts, wars, and terrorism have significant detrimental effects on the educational attainment of children and young adults. Conflicts have direct and indirect ramifications for schooling. The direct effects include the closure of schools and destruction of infrastructure necessary for reaching schools, relocation of teachers due to violence and intimidation, displacement of families and students, recruitment of child soldiers and the creation of an environment where parents are reluctant to release their children to school (Suleri et al., 2017). An indirect effect of conflict is the reallocation of resources within households, with children having to find work to supplement the family income. Out-of-school children are also easy targets of exploitation and abuse, a phenomenon that has far-reaching consequences for individuals and nations (Ashraf & Huma, 2019).

Maber (2018) and Bush & Saltarelli (2000) state that education has two facets; it can be used as an instrument of conflict or as a catalyst for peace. On the one hand, unequal access to education, denigration of minority groups, and providing varying levels of support to different school systems can sow social imbalance and polarize certain groups leading to conflicts. Education can also cultivate social, religious, or ethnic identities (Parker, 2016). On the other hand, education promotes social cohesion and is a vital ingredient for human development. It weeds out illiteracy and enhances an individual's skills and abilities, increasing their chances of finding gainful employment. Personal growth promotes social cohesion, thereby reducing the chances of a conflict. Cardozo et al. (2017) suggest that education is fundamental in preserving and promoting the values of human security, including peace, justice, democracy, and tolerance. It improves the socio-economic conditions of a people, empowers them, and improving security and observance of human rights (OECD, 2012).

Pakistan has faced considerable challenges in ensuring all children, especially the most disadvantaged in conflict-affected areas of the country, attend and stay in school. During the armed conflict of 2007-2009, Pakistan had the second-highest number of out-of-school children globally, with an estimated 23 million children aged between five and sixteen not attending school (Khan & Seltzer, 2016). This represented 44 percent of the total population in this age
group. The number of out-of-school children increased as they approached higher levels of education, with 11.4 million adolescents aged 10 to 14 not accessing education and only 6.4 million children enrolled in lower secondary level (Khan & Seltzer, 2016). The majority of the Pakistani children not attending school were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly Swat and FATA. In recent years, however, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has exhibited renewed interest in the education of its young population, premised on the realization that accessible, quality and inclusive education is crucial to bringing peace and future development (Fazalehaq & Aleem, 2017).

1.1.0 The Conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a province in North-Western Pakistan. It was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in 2010. Although culturally diverse, close to 70 percent of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's inhabitants are Pashtuns. The main languages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are Pashto, Khowar, Saraiki, Kohistani, and Hindko (Afridi et al., 2016). The province has been the battlefront for the Tehrik-e-Taliban insurgency in the last two decades (Arafat et al., 2019). In addition, other armed militant groups such as al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Islam, Jundallah, Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), and other Central Asian militant groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), East Turkistan Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Emirate of Caucasus have been at war with the Pakistani government for the control of the province (Arafat et al., 2019).
The violent conflicts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can be divided into two – conflict emanating from the SWAT area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and conflict with its roots in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a semi-independent region bordering Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the south-east. The displacement of people in the province has had adverse effects on education, especially from the displacement of people, as shown in Figure 1. The districts in green experienced outflows of people while those colored red had outflows. The light-green districts and dark-green districts had inflows from SWAT and FATA respectively.

Militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has its roots in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which planted seeds of jihadism in the region with the influence of Deobandi and Salafist religious thoughts (Feyyaz, 2019). However, the conflict situation deteriorated after the United States invaded Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks. As a result, most terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban, fled to north-western Pakistan. Terror groups were involved in suicide bombings, targeted and random killings, looting, destruction of public infrastructures such as schools and hospitals, and kidnappings (Orakzai, 2011). Various weapons such as ammunition and grenades were available and easily accessible to these groups. To foster local and regional movements in the name of implementing the Sharia Law, Jihadi groups used threats, intimidation, duress, and violence against the general population, forcing many to flee.

[Source: Sylla, 2011]
The attacks on Peshawar Army Public School, Bacha Khan University, Malakand District Courts and the Peshawar bus attack are few examples of terrorist activities. As Rahim (2014) states, “terrorism in Pakistan is multidimensional, deeply rooted and widespread in terms of underlying causes, novelty and variety of terror techniques.”

Since 2002, successive Pakistan governments have made efforts to counter militancy in FATA and Swat through military operations and peace agreements. However, the army has often applied disproportionate force, which is sometimes subjected to civilians (Sylla, 2011). Drone strikes by the U.S. CIA have further exacerbated the situation resulting in forced internal displacements of millions of people. Subsequently, the government operations have, from time to time, faced opposition from the public.

The Taliban have not achieved complete control of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as their activities are more intense in the two districts of Peshawar and SWAT (Torwali, 2021). Although other districts in the province such as Charsadda, Malakand, Nowshera, Bannu, Dir, Hangu, Tor Ghar, Mansehra, and Swabi have experienced at least one attack, the total number of attacks are fewer than those recorded in either SWAT or Peshawar (Torwali, 2021). Some districts have not experienced any attack. These include Abbotabad, Tank, Chitral, Buner, Kohistan, Haripur, Lakki Marwat, Kohat, Shangla, Dera, and Batagram (Sylla, 2011).

### 1.1.1 Impact of the Conflict on Education

Several studies point to the extent of the devastation of education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a direct result of the armed conflict. For example, Hayat (2009) suggests that terrorist attacks led to the closure of more than 900 schools between 2007 and 2009. A 2012 report by Amnesty International claimed that the conflict had deprived thousands of children of education in the region. Long after the conflict and after the defeat of the Taliban in Swat, teachers were still reluctant to return to work while girls were too intimidated to go back to school (Khan & Seltzer, 2016).

Sylla (2011) found that between October 2006 and October 2009, 491 public primary schools were temporarily closed. Twenty-five percent of these schools are in Swat. Approximately 112 of the schools closed in Swat cited violence, including bombing, burning, or shelling. Although the remaining schools were closed due to other reasons, such as the district education office’s decision or teacher departure, the reasons for closure can be linked to the insecurity in the province (Sylla, 2011). However, it is difficult to measure the exact effects of the conflict on school closure and enrollment since it is challenging to isolate the effects of violence from a plethora of other reasons, such as natural disasters, drop-out rates, and budget cuts, that may have led to a decrease in enrollment (Khan & Seltzer, 2016).

### 1.1.2 Recent Developments: Towards Peace and Security in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Relative peace has been achieved in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mainly through military operations and community engagement. The military has carried out seven major operations in the area.
since 2001, namely Zalzala, Al Mizan, Sher Dil, Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb, Enduring Freedom, and Radd ul Fasaad (Afridi et al., 2016). Many other smaller operations have also been carried out. Military activities have significantly suppressed the threat of terrorism, although the inhabitants of the affected areas are in constant fear of militants resurfacing, owing to the fact that the border with Afghanistan is still porous (Arafat et al., 2019). The conflict has also had devastating and long-lasting social and economic consequences for the people, such as loss of livelihoods, a decline in business activities, capital flight, destruction of critical infrastructure, and zero foreign investment. Moreover, as of 2016, nearly one million internally displaced persons were yet to be rehabilitated into their native villages (Afridi et al., 2016). Many returnees suffer from physical and psychological conditions such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies. The government, dozens of non-governmental organizations, and donors have been aggressively engaged in assisting the returnees resettle by not only providing basic public facilities but also through the provision of monetary and psychological support.

Local institutions have also played a critical role in fostering peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Masjid or Mosque is one of these institutions. In addition to conducting prayers, conflicts between different parties are resolved in mosques (Suleri et al., 2017). Jirga or community assemblies of elders are a significant traditional institution among the Pakhtuns (Suleri et al., 2017). Constituted by societal nobles and tribal chieftains, Jirgas are responsible for making decisions pertaining to communal issues and dispute resolution. Local public spaces where community issues are discussed by the Jirga (Hujras) and Tanzeems (volunteer committees and organizations) have also facilitated the return to normalcy in the area (Torwali, 2021).

Based on the acknowledgment that education is a cornerstone for stability, community restructuring, and peacebuilding, the national government and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s administration have focused on education reforms for the province to improve access to education learning outcomes (Fazalehaq & Aleem, 2017). In 2017, the FATA-based Directorate of Education developed a five-year comprehensive plan for the education sector, a document that largely borrowed from the National Education Policy of 2009. The government developed new textbooks for grades 1 to 10 that are better suited to student needs. Since 2013, the government has recruited more than 40,000 teachers through a merit-based and transparent process, while the number of schools has increased by more than 50 percent (Fazalehaq & Aleem, 2017). Attendance by both students and teachers has increased tremendously. The government aims to recruit 70,000 additional teachers, open one thousand new schools, add at least half a million seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa secondary schools, and expand access to education to 90% among children between the ages of 5 to 9, in the next five years (UNICEF, 2021). Considering the fact that in 2013, 50 percent of children in Grade 5 could neither read nor comprehend text intended for Grade 2 students, the government aims to ensure that every child in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa acquires basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNICEF, 2021).
1.2 Statement of the Problem

Access to education should be guaranteed for every child, regardless of how difficult the circumstances are (Zakharia, 2016). The importance of education to human and personal development has been affirmed by the international community through the global initiative of Education for All (EFA). The Dakar Framework for Action, which reiterated the global commitment to achieving EFA by 2015, identified six goals, among them expanding and improving early childhood education, especially for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to education, and eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary school enrolment. Additionally, one of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was to achieve universal primary education by 2015. While this goal has remained elusive, the United Nation’s Agenda for Sustainable Development that established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has outlined the objective of attaining inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all (Milton, 2017).

Despite the global efforts to ensure that all children acquire education, learning in conflict areas has often been overlooked, particularly the role played by education in post-conflict peacebuilding. Governments, aid agencies, and charitable organizations emphasize other conflict resolution and peacebuilding methods such as ceasefire agreements, military interventions, and the establishment of peace zones (Ndura-Ouédraogo, 2009). However, most of these activities are short-term oriented and fail to achieve long-lasting peace and stability in the long run. As Maiese (2016) asserts, peacebuilding is a long-term process that not only encompasses peacekeeping and peacemaking but also includes transformative efforts. Thus, education is central to the peacebuilding process. Vital aspects of peacebuilding, such as character formation, reconciliation, and socialization, can be associated with education (Kapur, 2018). As suggested by Smith (2010), the role of education goes beyond provision. It supports transformations in political structures, social cohesion, and economic recovery. Formal and informal learning also teaches non-violent skills and can significantly contribute to de-radicalization by grounding former extremists on the true meaning of religion. To achieve these objectives, an education system must be diverse, inclusive, and participatory.

The transition to peace in post-conflict environments is more often than not problematic, which prevents the realization of the optimum benefits of education. For example, the definition of peacebuilding lacks clarity, and there still lacks consensus on the meaning of the term. Such challenges make it difficult to determine what should be included in education programs and how different aspects of peacebuilding ought to be taught (Maber, 2018). There is also a conflict between politically motivated short-term objectives and service delivery and long-term efforts to achieve political, social, and economic transformations (Maber, 2018).

With the established relation between education and peacebuilding, this study puts theory into practice through an analysis of the contribution of education towards peacebuilding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a conflict-ridden region such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, education presents one of the best instruments to achieve inclusion, equality, reconciliation, social capital formation, and long-lasting peace. A major focus of this study is how education policies in
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province support peace building processes and the role education is playing in achieving positive and sustainable peace.

1.3 Purpose of the Study
Researchers and policymakers agree that quality, relevant, equitably available, and conflict-sensitive education is crucial to fostering and promoting peace and safe environments. However, there is a lack of clarity concerning the change theories through which education contributes to the peace building processes. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the contribution of education to peacebuilding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through an evaluation of learner perspectives.

1.4 Significance of the Study
This study aims to provide an investigation of the role of education in peace building. The research will build upon the existing evidence base on the subject to ensure government and donor policies and programs are better informed and empirically driven. In addition, it will provide an insight into the educational interventions and approaches by the government of Pakistan. An important aspect of the present study is that it accomplishes the research objectives by examining the subject from the perspective of learners instead of players in the education and political administrators, which will ensure that the evidence gathered is not biased. The study will also identify whether the education programs currently being provided to learners have missed the opportunity to build peace among young people and recommend changes to existing programs or new programs that are more effective and have a stronger role in peace building.

1.5 Research Questions
The following research questions guide this study:
1. To what extent peace building interventions gendered in the Pakistani education system?
2. What does education mean for learners enrolled in upper primary and secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
3. Do learners feel their learning is addressing the underlying causes of conflict?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
The breadth of literature on education, conflict, and post-conflict environments has been growing steadily in the last few years. Previous research has focused on integrating peace building interventions into education systems, policies, and programs and the role, with limited literature laying an insight into how learning outcomes can precipitate peaceful coexistence and stability in contexts of conflict. While players in the academic and practitioner circles agree that education is vital for communities emerging from conflicts as it helps in recovery efforts and building sustainable peace, political leaders and policymakers see it as a soft strategy that need not be prioritized. As such, it is of marginal concern to governments and international agencies. Some
actors, however, believe that, on the contrary, education is key to promoting sustainable peace, reconciliation, and social justice.

2.1 The Concept of Peace building

Johan Galtung introduced the term “peace building” in 1975 in his publication “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peace building.” Additionally, Galtung (1975) introduced the core concepts of peace, including positive peace, negative peace, sustainable peace, root causes of conflict, and structural violence (Cardozo, 2018). Novelli (2011) emphasizes the dynamic and transformational nature of peace building, stating that “peace building is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords.” He argues that peace is a dynamic construct build into a society in a manner that transforms relationships.

In recent years, peace building has been defined differently by various actors. For academics, peace building refers to the removal of the root causes of structural and cultural violence that directly or indirectly feed and fuel conflict (Novelli, 2011). Peace building seeks to establish positive and permanent peace. As such, a post-conflict society must establish structures that eliminate the elements and structures of violence and provide alternatives to war. Humanitarian and security-first advocates understand peace building as denoting a distinct set of activities to bring about stability in the aftermath of a conflict. Peace building constitutes the raft of measures that strengthen community and national capacities to reduce and possibly eliminate the risk of relapsing into war.

One peace theory offered by security-first advocates is the liberal peace thesis. According to Cardozo et al. (2017), the liberal peace thesis emphasizes a trickle-down approach featuring the achievement of security, followed by the introduction of market forces and liberal democracy to establish stability. Attaining cessation of violence or negative peace is the first objective, while the second aim is the introduction of representative democracy. The resultant favorable business climate will encourage local and foreign direct investments, spurring economic growth. However, a major limitation of this peace approach is that the trickle-down effects may never reach the intended marginalized populations. In fact, it may lead to the resumption of hostilities (Cardozo et al., 2017). Mc Candless (2011) argues that while the liberal peace building model should not be viewed in isolation, its proliferation into international peace building programs may provide the rationale for the marginalization of the social services approach to peace building – which prioritizes education, health, and social welfare.

2.2 Role of Education in Peacebuilding

Ellison (2012) suggests that education should assume a more central role in peace building strategies and should also be integrated into all phases of the peace building process. Education contributes to peace building in several ways. While disarmament and demobilization are
integral to attaining negative peace, reintegration of former warring parties into the society is only achievable through skills training (Khan et al., 2020). Such training entails imparting skills useful to recreating livelihoods. Giving former combatants an alternative to violence by empowering them economically confers them the means to sustain themselves and is an integral component to long-term individual and societal transformation.

Secondly, education re-establishes a sense of normalcy for children. Formal learning promotes the cognitive, psychological, and emotional development of children. Ellison (2012) states that education has a symbolic significance for many post-conflict communities – it signifies a functional system and state-building. Additionally, school buildings provide locations from which essential social services such as feeding and vaccination programs can be provided to children and the community. Thirdly, education is closely linked to social transformation. It teaches decency, moral values, a proper code of conduct, norms, and values, as well as communication (Byrne et al., 2019). It helps in character formation, which is an essential social trait. Education provides a foundation upon which individuals and society can understand themselves and their environment, which provides a basis for political security, social, cultural, and economic development. Byrne et al. (2019) assert that the social, cultural, moral, ethical, and spiritual values created through learning are transmitted from one generation to another, further promoting coexistence among future generations.

Kapur (2018) posits that formal learning facilitates the development of positive ideologies, including the notions such as state-building and moderate viewpoints. It also provides the skills and expertise necessary for economic development, the building of social structures, social mobility, and individual participation in community affairs. The feeling that one is intellectually empowered to have a say in their society and can contribute towards a new political and social dispensation eliminates elements of discontent and rebellion.

Several studies suggest that certain aspects of education may have negative implications for peace building. Foregrounding this school of thought is the publication by Bush & Saltarelli (2000), titled The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. The authors highlight the potentiality of education in generating inequalities and fueling conflict. Firstly, education facilitates ideological development, which in extreme situations may lead to political indoctrination. Secondly, an education system that raises equity concerns by excluding certain groups of individuals from the social and economic opportunities that learning provides can result in conflict. Thirdly, although education serves as a mechanism for inter-generational transmission of social, cultural, and ethical values, it may explicitly or impliedly generate negative stereotypes, behavior or attitudes that enkindle violence.

In this regard, the state must be cautious about the form and content of education and the way it is provided. Some researchers emphasize the need for the education provided to communities emerging from ethnic violence, war, or militancy to be conflict-sensitive (Ellison, 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Maber, 2018). The administration and operationalization of an education system may be subject to political influences in terms of appointments, curriculum determination and rollout, and recruitment and deployment of teachers. Although ownership,
equity, inclusivity, and participation may be enhanced through the decentralization of education systems, processes may be manipulated by local political leaders (Shahab & Ullah, 2021). To minimize the limiting aspects of education for peace building, the state must institute proper governance structures and ensure accountability and transparency in the management of the education system. Smith et al. (2011) assert that conflict-sensitive education plays a critical role in transitional justice, essential for preventing future justice. Societies emerging from conflict transition from violence and human rights abuses to a state of security and democracy. Justice and reconciliation can help a post-conflict society heal from the scars of war (Milton, 2017). Thus, education is central to achieving transitional justice. The teaching of subjects such as history, citizenship, and human rights transforms pedagogical practices embedding critical thinking skills in learners and creating an institutional culture of nationalism and patriotism, which are essential components of the peace building process (Milton, 2017).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Data was collected using observations and open-ended semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to acquire rich and vast data about education and peace building in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to Choy (2014), qualitative research “does not narrowly focus on a specific question but ponder the theoretical and philosophical paradigm in an inquisitive, open-ended settling in proves as they adopt a perspective.” This research approach recognizes the sensitivity of the participant’s interactions with the subject matter whilst simultaneously being scientifically rigorous. The qualitative method enabled the researcher to obtain descriptive and in-depth data about perceptions, opinions, and practices of learners about the integration of peace building into their pedagogy and within their schools’ natural setting and making meaning through learner perspectives. It also allowed the researcher to nature long-term interactions with the participants, allowing them to open up and give a detailed account of their thoughts and feelings on education and peace building in their respective school contexts.

The research also took an interpretivist position. This research paradigm is founded on the assumption that social reality is neither objective nor singular but is rather shaped by experiences and relationships with other people within a particular social or cultural context. As such, a meaningful reality can only be constructed through extensive dialog between the researcher and research participants. To maintain participant confidentiality, the participant data was coded. In a qualitative inquiry, a code is a short phrase or word that assigns a summative attribute for each element of visual or language-based data.

3.2 Participants and Research Context
The study was conducted in three secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The first school is in North Waziristan District (Bannu Division), the second is in Peshawar District (Peshawar Division), while the third is located in Dera Ismail Khan District (Dera Ismail Khan Division). The choice of schools in different districts within the province was informed by the need to consider the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region. Additionally, selecting participants from three different districts would allow the exploration of the differences and similarities in learner perceptions about education and peacebuilding in their particular contexts.

A total of 113 participants were selected for the interviews. The study utilized the convenience sampling technique in selecting participants. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which target participants have to meet certain criteria. For this research, respondents were selected from public sector secondary schools only. The interviews were conducted in Urdu, Pakistan's national language. Further, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and audiotaped. Later, they were translated into English.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Bryman & Bell (2007) highlight the principles related to ethical considerations in qualitative research, including respect for the dignity of the respondents, voluntary and free consent of research participants, and privacy and confidentiality of respondent data. To ensure observed ethical principles, the researcher sought approval from the District Education Officer and the Head Teachers of the target schools prior to conducting the study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage during the research. The participants were briefed about the nature of the interviews before each interview started. They were also allowed to see the interview transcripts and suggest adjustments or clarifications to the views expressed during the interview. The researcher also obtained informed consent from the participants by providing them with adequate information about the study and its implications to enable them to reach an informed decision on whether to participate in the study or not. Each participant signed the informed consent form. Additionally, measures were taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

4.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study investigates the role of education in peace building from learner perspectives in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. 113 participants from public secondary schools in the province were interviewed. The elements of peace building that were the subject of the interviews included the six issues identified by Johnson (2005). The researcher sought to establish whether the participants felt the aspects of peace building were adequately integrated into their education, and whether in overall the participants perceived learning as contributing to positive peace in the province.

The participants were selected from three public secondary schools as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants
The distribution of participants was as follows in terms of gender and stage of education was as follows:

(i) **Gender**
   61.9 percent of the participants were male while 38.1 percent were female.

**Figure 2: Gender of Participants**

(ii) **Stage of Education**
    All the participants were enrolled in secondary school with 16.8 percent in Grade 9, 18.6 percent in Grade 10, 29.2 percent in Grade 11, and 35.4 percent in Grade 12.

**Fig 3: Participant Stage of Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>North Waziristan District</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Peshawar District</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Dera Ismail Khan District</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>113</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The factors identified by the participants as contributing to peace building in the province include (i) history (ii) conflict resolution techniques (iii) gender equality (iv) social cohesion (v) human rights and (vi) Islamic studies.

**Figure 4: Participant Perceptions of the Role of Education in Peace building**

The descriptive statistics for measuring learner perceptions of the role of education in peace building education were derived for the six elements of education as shown in Table 2.
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Effectiveness of Elements of Education in Peace building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>25.18</td>
<td>3.629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic studies</td>
<td>29.64</td>
<td>4.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution techniques</td>
<td>17.34</td>
<td>2.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>2.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social cohesion</td>
<td>21.72</td>
<td>3.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td>2.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>20.115</td>
<td>3.361</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that learners perceived Islamic studies as having the highest contribution to peace building (M = 29.64, SD = 4.951), followed by History (M = 25.18, SD = 3.629), social cohesion (M = 21.72, SD = 3.053), and conflict resolution techniques (M = 17.34, SD = 2.937). Gender equality (M = 11.8, SD = 2.621) and human rights (M = 15.01, SD = 2.972) studies had the least contribution to peace building. The overall value shows that learners perceived education as having playing a role towards peace building.

Table 3: Correlating Education and Peace building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic studies</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution techniques</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social cohesion</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2-tailed Sig>.05)

The results in Table 3 show that the elements of all the elements of education showed significant relationship with peace building with probability value of less than 0.05. As indicated by Pearson r values, Islamic studies had the highest relationship with peace building (r = .49), followed by History (r = 0.45), social cohesion (r = .41), conflict resolution techniques (r = .36),
and human rights \((r = .34)\). Gender equality had the least positive relationship with peace building.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of Elements of Education and Peace building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>(f)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>108631.941</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23719.513</td>
<td>192.379</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>217284.283</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>294.508</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>325916.224</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A multiple linear regression analysis was run to predict learner perception of the contribution of education to peace building. Table 4 indicates that the six elements of education significantly combine to predict the role of education in peace building. The coefficient of determination \(r^2 = .33\) shows that 33 percent variances in student perceptions can be explained through the six elements of education. Additionally, five of the six factors, individually, significantly combined to predict learner perceptions of the role of education in peace building.

Thus, majority of the students perceive the learning of History and Islamic Studies as having the most significant contribution to peace building. Four participants from School B explained that they are taught conflict resolution methods as part of Islamic Studies, a mandatory subject in the curriculum. A participant from School A stated:

The Islamic Studies textbook has a lot of peace promoting content such as social cohesion, respect for one another, tolerance, and conflict resolution. Learning Islamic studies has made me respect my teachers and fellow students and respect their views and opinions.

Another participant from School C explained:

We have no separate subject or textbook on peace studies. However, our History teacher has taught us the principles of nationalism. I feel I understand my country better and I am more patriotic than I was while in Grade 7 or 6.

Additionally, a participant from School C shared:

Learning in school enhances our understanding of peace. Teachers and non-governmental organizations that often visit our school teachers the importance of peace.

Moreover, another participant from school A posited:

Our Islamic Studies teacher always reminds us to love and forgive each other. When you feel wronged by someone, you should report the incident to the school administration...
rather than revenging or fighting them. I have learned to coexist peacefully with others peacefully at school and at home.

Another participant from School C stated:

Group work while doing assignments and co-curricular activities has enabled me understand my classmates better. Two of my classmates are of a different religion. The three of us are in the school Rugby team and playing alongside each other has taught me to help each other and cultivate positive relationships with them.

Most of the participants shared that the school environment enables create friends from different cultures and religious background. Greater collaboration is achieved among students when they perform school activities together which enhances peace. However, a number of participants emphasized the need for peace education to be taught as a separate and independent subject to enhance peace building among the youth in the province.

5.0. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined the role of education in peace building from the perspective of learners, who are the direct consumers of peace programs in schools. To accomplish its purpose, participants from three schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, were interviewed. Each participant was given the time and space to articulate their opinions, perspectives, and views regarding the contribution of formal learning to the peace building process. The majority of the participants recognize the crucial role of education in peace building. Subjects and topics taught in school such as history, social cohesion, religious studies, conflict resolution, human rights, and gender equality were recognized by the participants as key aspects of the peace building process, especially in creating a greater understanding of positive peace among young people.

Post-conflict regions around the world have the potential of relapsing into conflict if sufficient measures are not implemented to promote long-term peace (Ellison, 2012). Education is widely recognized by researchers, governments, and humanitarian agencies as one of the most effective tools for facilitating positive peace. The lack of an effective education system and large numbers of out-of-school children in regions emerging from conflicts is detrimental to peace building efforts (Maber, 2018). Some scholars have emphasized the need for education in conflict and post-conflict regions to be inclusive, gender-sensitive, and participatory, stating that the absence of these attributes has the potential of exacerbating conflicts (Smith et al., 2011).

The knowledge and understanding acquired from formal learning promote peace building in several aspects. Children and youth are often the targets of violent or extremist groups that use political and religious ideologies to attract and recruit members (Byrne et al., 2019). They are often the target because they are easy to manipulate and teach new knowledge. Young people are also healthy and energetic and can be subjected to the vigorous training of extremist groups (Ahmed, 2017). When they are not recruited, children are abused and subjected to harsh conditions when violence breaks out. Young girls are particularly at greater risk of being
sexually abused and subjected to early marriages (Ahmed, 2017). As such, one of the quickest means to bring stability and contribute to long-term peace in conflict regions is to ensure that all children of school-going age return to school regardless of their background. Schools provide a safe environment where children can learn and interact with one another (Maber, 2018). It also creates normality for children and supports their psychological and cognitive development.

Education also imparts life-long technical and professional skills for economic empowerment. A major contributor to youths being recruited into extremist groups is the lack of economic opportunity (Novelli, 2011). Young people who undergo the formal education process have better chances of finding gainful employment, enabling them to sustain themselves financially (OECD, 2012). Meanwhile, educated people possess the skills to start and operate businesses, promoting the prospects of a thriving private sector. They are also better equipped to develop or adopt technologies that can assist in the economic and social recovery of their communities (Maiese, 2016).

Critical aspects of peace building, such as conflict resolution and dispute settlement procedures, are inculcated into individuals through education (Kapur, 2018). Religious studies, for example, teaches young boys and girls to resolve conflicts among peers in a peaceful manner, rather than resorting to violence or revenge. They are able to develop positivity, thoughtful, considerate, tolerant, emotional management, and improve their communication skills (Ashraf & Huma, 2019). Such traits are vital for resolving minor conflicts and can be reflected in the way groups, communities, and nations resolve conflicts. Other vital attributes for peacebuilding, such as nationalism, reconciliation, and understanding of the historical context, can be effectively taught to young people through formal learning (OECD, 2012).

In the last decade, the government of Pakistan and the regional administration of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have recognized and appreciate the significant role of education instability and peace building and implemented a raft of policy measures to enhance school enrolment. Through collaboration with non-governmental organizations, peace education programs have been introduced in schools across the province. While these measures are positive, this study recommends that peace education be integrated into the school curriculum. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa education department should revisit its education strategy to incorporate a greater and organized component of peace education in elementary and secondary schools.

To make peace teaching an integral part of the school curriculum, the government should introduce peace education as a mandatory subject. The government may also develop peace studies textbooks and introduce teacher training programs. Schools should also be encouraged to adopt a more participatory approach to learning instead of the current system of teaching through punishment. Allowing students to participate in the learning process and express their views and perspectives is crucial to enhancing peace building through education.
References


