Dialogue for Sustainable Peace: An Exploratory Case Study from Chitral

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Abstract

This paper explores dialogue as a model and an effective strategy in peace education for promoting sustainable peace in district Chitral, a far-flung and relatively peaceful district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. An in-depth qualitative study was conducted to explore the views of teachers about the role of dialogue in maintaining and promoting peace. In the qualitative paradigm the case study method was used and the data were collected through a semi structured interview schedule and observation. The study finds that teaching the art of dialogue and motivation for dialogue is the need of the day to maintain the ideal peace of Chitral. It also shows that extremist narratives and negative peace of Chitral can be transformed into positive peace through dialogue, acceptance of and appreciation for diversity, tolerance, accommodation of others' views and critical consciousness. To promote such a critically conscious society, schools can play a positive role if they have proper counselling service and inclusive and accommodative classroom culture. Moreover, democratic environment of the school motivates student to resort to peaceful settlement of conflicts. This in the long turn may become integral part of their temperament and mould their decision making and implementing strategies to peaceful coexistence. The major conclusion is that dialogue is an effective tool for peace keeping and peace building and it can be taught at school level. It also adds that creating peaceful environment and mind setting of students can be better achieved by teachers' positive attitude and humanly dispositions in times of crisis and conflict.

Key words: Peace, Peace Education, Sustainable Peace, Peace Keeping, Dialogue.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, socio economic and political challenges have created an environment of tension and hatred which may burst into direct violence and clashes at large scale. The world powers, big or small, are at the verge of destruction due to continual and emerging hostilities, as they have failed to accommodate diversity and different viewpoints along with many more in-capabilities. The world has been facing dreadful incidents in the form of wars and atrocities such as attack on USA's Word Trade Centre, London bombings, the Syrian crisis, and invasions on Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, the world landscape is prone to destruction due to the rigid and inflexible attitude of the world powers.

In the technologically advanced world, no nation can isolate itself from the pros and cons of changing time, as terrorist actions are no longer isolated incidents; rather they are global threats to lives and freedoms of speech, movement and choice. Thus, Pakistan is not an exception to the above vulnerabilities. Since its establishment, state and non-state actors have been a threat to the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity of Pakistan. Centre for Pace and Development initiatives (2012) portrays Pakistan's four provinces as prone to ethnic separatism, sectarian violence and the rise of Islamic extremism. In addition, growing number of organizations with violent ideologies and fluent recruitment of people in such organization makes the scene even bleaker.

Causes of the above-mentioned prevailing situation, according to the Commonwealth Commission (2007), are no or less opportunities to participate and even to representation in political and economic field, racism, deprivation, identity crisis, non-acceptance, inflexibility and above all the lack of dialogue and table talks. Lack of dialogue and least tolerance of others' views has given birth to socially and politically oppressed groups within the country who use violent means to pressurize government and public. Thus, horrendous terrorist activities have been observed in the country. During 2005 to 2015, when terrorism was at its peak, Pakistan lost more than 60,000 people having worst economic and psychological impact on the national in general and the bereaved families

in particular. According to Lieven (2011) growing extremism and terrorism in Pakistan has not only threatened national economy rather it has affected international image of the country along with causing severe psychological impacts on the population and widening of sectarian hatred and social gaps

Crosi (2004) has identified that all the provinces and Tribal areas experience either terrorism and ethno-religious extremism. However, few places including Chitral (where this study has been conducted) are still more peaceful as compared to the rest of the areas (Tajik, 2016). How the existence of peace in the midst of all these troubles could be explained? Tajik (2016) has identified the role of civil society and particular value system of Chitral as the key contributor to the prevailing peace in the region. However, it has remained unexplored that to which extent dialogue, social gathering, and principles of mutual co-existence have contributed to the peace of Chitral? It is here that I found the gap and explored the perceptions of teachers, who are teaching social studies/Pakistan Studies in higher secondary schools in the district, about the potential role of dialogue in sustainable peace keeping and building.

Theoretical background to the study

The diversity in experiences, understanding, interest, purpose and area have been determining factors for explaining the word peace (UNESCO, 2001). That is why it is a complex notion to understand as it is defined differently by the people from different walks of life. A lawyer's definition of peace is different from that of an economist, politician, military man and an educationist. According to UNESCO (2001) people practically tend to define peace, according to their own preferred perspectives.

In the field of education and research peace can either be positive or negative. Absence of war and direct conflict is termed as negative peace, while no direct violence along with presence of collaborative, integrative and cooperative environment are the connotation of positive peace (Galtung, 2013). Furthermore, socio-political, cultural and economic conditions of a region also affect the understanding of peace and thus it varies from place to place. According to Salmon and Nevo (2002) the definition of peace is different in the regions of intractable conflicts,

intrinsic tension and regions having tranquillity. Despite so much complexities there is no denying the fact that peace is a global need today, as world powers are at draggers drawn against each other due to lack of acceptance and appreciation of diversity. To enhance respect for diversity and promote harmony, peace education can be one of the best tools.

The concept of peace education is more religious than political in its historical background. Almost all religions keep peace as their central theme (Elias, 2013),. He believes that motivation through spiritual teachings, consultation and dialogue is the key towards global sustainable peace. In the same way Haris as cited in Salmon and Nevo (2002) asserts that the concept of peace education is taken from religious teachings where dialogue and peaceful settlement of conflicts is the key message.

Dialogue, being one of the key components of peace education, is a meaningful solution to world peace and security issues. Clark (2001) believes that "imposed peace" and "consensual peace" are the two key strategies in maintaining and solving world peace and security issues. However, consensual peace is although time consuming yet relatively permanent in nature. School based peace education promotes consensual peace where peace-making, and pace building are the two key components. Moreover, accommodation of alternatives and table talk is one of the best possible ways to achieve consensual peace. Johnson (2005) considers school-based peace initiatives as part of peace building where long-term harmonious relationship and non-violent ways are keys to create peace.

Schools and school-based peace education are the basic elements of socialization, where collaboration and cooperation enhance peace and reduce violence by discouraging unhealthy competition and rivalry. For the said purpose, dialogue and art of dialogue is taught and practiced in the schools, which in the long run changes the minds of the students in favour of peace keeping through non-violent ways. To enhance the capacity and utility of dialogue and cooperation peace educators provide knowledge of alternatives to violence.

In a nutshell, through skills like dialogue, peace-making as well as maintaining become possible where the promotion of one's views and ideals through violent ways is discouraged. Moreover, dialogue causes consensual peace which is the result of human mind and thus permanent.

Violence is the brainchild of human mind thus solution must also come from there not from force is an old adage coming very fit in the scenario.

The methodology

Social studies teachers from an NGO run selected higher secondary schools in Chitral were my research participants. After teaching social studies/Pakistan studies for more than a decade, it was my personal stance that Social Studies has maximum peace education themes in its laps and teachers are the possible biggest contributor to shape personalities towards peaceful settlement of conflicts. The criteria for selecting the research participants was purposive sampling which according to Creswell (2014) is a way of selecting approachable and purposeful participants to get richest possible data.

Being in the qualitative paradigm, collecting in depth and extensive data was the need of the study (Creswell, 2017). Therefore, I used multiple data collection methods such as semi structured interviews, observation and document analysis for collecting the data. Through semi structured interview it was possible to explore the views of teachers about the role of dialogue for sustainable peace. Moreover, observations were used to triangulate the views of the teacher that teaching the art of dialogue and being model helps in changing the perspectives of the students regarding dialogue to minimize conflicts. Furthermore, some of the school documents were also analysed to explore that either organizational policies help in promoting dialogue through creating a democratic environment or not.

I started data collection and analysis simultaneously. The data analysis procedure was undertaken by labelling and unfolding the data as well as exemplifying and evaluating the data by 'breaking down into data sets' using colour coding techniques (Simon, 2009, p. 117). Usually, this data analysis procedure follows the data collection yet keeping them side by side helps a researcher to frequently check the data and refer back to the participants in case of ambiguities (Merriam, 2009).

An intensive and in-depth analysis of the data from interview, observation and document analysis was significantly helpful in developing themes and subthemes to report the finding. It is however, to be noted that during the process I frequently went back to the data (initial interview

transcripts, field notes and observational notes) to identify further themes and ideal (Merriam, 2009).

Research context and participants

This research was conducted in two private higher secondary schools in Chitral District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. A brief description of each school and research participants is given below with pseudonym.

Al- Zahra higher secondary school

This school was established with the idea of quality education for girls. Every year the school enrols 40 girls in Grade VIII by a merit process of test and interview. The school provides science education with equipped laboratories and well-furnished library with the help of 15 subject specialists.

Ustad Sayyam, my first research participant teaches Social Studies/Pakistan Studies in this school to the students of secondary and higher secondary classes. His views were explored through semi structured interview and his classes were also observed.

Al-Hussain higher secondary school

This school was established to provide quality education to boys in the district. This school also selects students on merit based on test and interview. The total population of the school includes 324 students, 16 teachers, one principal, three admin and finance staff, one library officer and five supporting staff. The building is purpose built, and teachers are properly trained in modern teaching learning methodologies.

Ustad Khayyam, a university graduate teaching Social Studies/Pakistan Studies in the school was another research participant. He was teaching Social Studies/ Pakistan Studies to the students of Grades VIII to XII in the school for the last about two years.

Key findings and discussions

Following themes emerged from the study;
1. Perception of peace and peace education varies from person to person thus ways to maintain peace also vary.

2. Dialogue, counselling and accommodation of other views help changing negative peace into positive peace.
3. Democratic school environment promotes dialogue and motivates students to resort to peaceful settlement of disputes.
4. Organizational polices, if adhere to peace teaching, can be helpful making the environment peace friendly and can strengthen students' beliefs on peaceful settlement of conflicts.
5. Teachers' attitude and dispositions ultimately inspire students towards dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes.

Nature of peace and peace education

The participants perceive peace differently despite having agreement on the necessity and utility of peaceful environment (Bajaj, 2008; Najjuma, 2011). For instance, Sayaam (pseudonym) believes peace as a result of one's internal feelings and perceptions. He believes that human actions are guided by human mind which is sensitive to social system, family background, pattern of running ideologies and religious practices in the surrounding. In other words, day to day happenings in the society mould human mind which lead to human actions either positive or negative. Hence mind guides the body to act peacefully or violently.

Building on this assertion Sayyam said;

> Personality formation is highly influenced by family background, religious teaching and political system. Social values like respect, tolerance, acceptance and positive behaviour are the outcome of family and nurture. These values and behaviour are the real manifestation of peace. In other words, we can say peace comes from our inner side. The way people react to the incidents determine either there is peace of mind or not. (Interview, March 3, 2016).

On the other hand, Khayyam (pseudonym for another participant) despite acknowledging the roe of peace education for maintaining and keeping peace in the society, disagreed in the way of teaching peace. He believes that transformation of a conflict ridden society into peaceful society sometime needs use of power and authority in an authoritarian way. Thus, along with peaceful means one must resort to power from time to time to keep peace. While taking about the use of power and authority

Khayyam said "We need to punish those who are habitual to violate law". He further claimed;

> To maintain peace, we need certain skills and values. Those can be anger management, decision making and analysing the scenario critically. Moreover, respect, mutual understanding, listening to each other's viewpoint and being gentle are also helpful in peace building. However, we also need to consider power as a medium to bring peace. You see there are certain chronic groups who are not ready to accept you and here one is needed to be forceful. The more violently you react the sooner they come to the right track. (Interview, March 7, 2016).

The difference in perceiving or approaching to peace is not a new concept rather it validates the views of previous researcher (Bajaj, 2008; Salomon, 2004; Najjuma, 2011; Shamsuddin, 2016). In this study the difference of understanding peace might be because of two reasons; a) leadership style and school environment of the participant teachers and b) research location being in the centre of conflict regions and government's no-clear-way to achieve peace (some time resort to dialogue and the other to use of force).Gregory et al. (2010) also believe that environment and leadership style changes the perception of people about peace and gaining peace. Thus, leadership style within the school and national landscape to deal conflicts have possibly shaped the views of the participant teachers. Whatever the reason, it is more clear that understanding of peace is contextual and may vary from place to place, era to era and person to person.

Dialogue for sustainable peace

Due to scientific and technological advancement, today's classroom/school are more prone to global issues as well as learning. Diversity in looking at challenges and approaches to their settlement, unique experiences due to family background and above all different learning styles and social behaviour of each students has made the school/classroom a global phenomenon. This kind of diversity may harm the school environment by creating ethnic, racial or unguided intellectual difference. To deal with such scenario and to make the classroom a place for learning, inculcation and promotion of values of respect for and

appreciation of diversity can be more useful. Sayyam believes that culturally diverse classroom time to time causes conflicts among the students "resulting sometimes into fistfights" (Field Note, April 4, 2016). Here counselling and dialogue plays pivotal role to minimize the gap among students and to promote respect for diversity. Dialogue, being a source of interactive conflict resolution helps solving the issues through nonviolent ways (Fisher, 1997; Bercovith, Kremenyuk & Zartman, 2008). One of the participants explained this situation in the following words:

> 'If a case of fight or using abusive language is reported, we call both the parties and listen to them and come to the solution with the agreement of both the parties. We do not punish the offender without listening to him or her. The offender is morally bound to apologize and the concerned to forgive. This is an indirect way to teach them conflict resolution. (Interview, March 3, 2016).

It indicates the use of counselling and dialogue aims at correcting the scene instead of mere punishment. Using punishment as revengeful activity rather than corrective measures may cause more problems instead of positively changing human behaviour. Whereas, dialogue has always been relatively productive to change the scene (Abu-Nimer, 2012). Moreover, teachers' involvement in correcting the mistakes and teaching non-violent ways also conform the idea of third-party involvement as first step to create dialogue (Saunders, 2003). Through dialogues negative peace can also be changed into positive peace. It is the nature of relationship among people which resulted into lifetime troubles and clashes. According to Saunders (2003) dialogue is the most significant way of transforming and changing relationship dynamics.

It can be concluded that the teachers perceive dialogue and counselling as the effective tools to maintain peace in the school premises. Along with practicing themselves they are trying to make it a part of school culture. Different classroom charts and slogans on the wall like "if we create conflict, we should resolve" are some of the examples that how the school is serious about inculcation of dialogue as peace promoting strategy among its students.

Organizational policies and peaceful environment facilitate dialogue

The school environment plays pivotal role in the promotion of dialogue and respect of others viewpoints. The study found that a school aiming at promoting culture of peace needs to encourage dialogue and respect for diversity. The participants believe that co-curricular activities are the useful ways to broaden students' horizon and to give them alternatives. Interestingly, the school environment confirms the claims of the participant by showcasing school's annual co-curricular activities calendar along with objectives to be achieved through such programs. One of the soft boards states "World environment day aims at connecting us with nature for a peaceful planet".

Peaceful and student oriented environment in the school is because of school policies and programs. Role and responsibilities, with regard to any program, are clearly chalked out in the policy documents and special SOPs drafted for any co-curricular activity. The school management and teacher are well aware that peace education program becomes possible because they are supported by the already agreed documents. Clarity and explicit nature of school policies helps promoting peace skills and values i.e. positive attitude, accommodation of diversity, acceptance of one's mistakes, timely decision making and humanistic approach to issues (Interview, March10, 2016).

Interestingly, the School Academic Policy Document (SADP) also facilitates diversity oriented school culture by promoting gender sensitivity and inclusiveness. The document categorically declares zero tolerance for any type of biases and discrimination on the basis of sect or sex. One of the encouraging statement in the document is;

> 'The organization aspires to eliminate gender discrimination by promoting gender equity. All the school management, staff members (teaching and non-teaching) and students have the responsibility of treating every individual with respect and dignity, using a language that is gender-inclusive in all facets of school life' (School Academic Policy Document 2015, p. 34).

Moreover, the School Academic Policy Document (SAPD) encourages diversity, tolerance, respect for others, and discipline. Along with that there are clear provisions against any type of harassment of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, area, language, culture or religion. These policies help developing a pluralistic culture in the school which

makes students mindful and peace promoter by enhances students' compatibility with the global peace values.

The organizational policies and school's policy documents also confirm that the policy is needed to be implemented through positive and peaceful ways. For any offender, violator of the classroom norms and school policies there is a specific peaceful procedure to make him/her informed follower of the rules and regulations (School Academic Policy Document, 2016). The document states that any offender needs to be counselled, dialogued and given frequent chances to rectify his/her behaviour. More significantly, during field visits it was found that the school's counselling unit was open for the students for individual as well as collective gathering with the counsellor and other teachers. In such meetings, due respect is given to the students who violate school norms and rules (Field Note April 11, 2016).

It is worthy to mention that peaceful implementation of school policies and procedures, facilitate better teacher-student relationships which in turn motivate students to resort to peaceful settlement of disputes in the long run as they learn from the real field first and from books later (Horner et al, 2015).

Modelling promotes dialogue

Human actions are guided by their attitude and worldviews. Positivity and optimistic approach results into peacefulness and hopefulness. That is why the schools are trying to mould students' worldview in a positive direction. The school gives enough importance to students' perception and perspectives even on small issues. This excerpt from one interview justifies the stance;

> You can say the glass is either "half full or half empty". But the way you look towards things, influence your actions. Therefore, while teaching history, we never concentrate on one aspect rather we analyse the good and bad both. We teach them to have alternatives for any action. After all, having different approaches makes you optimist even after failing to achieve the target in the first attempt. Even our religion forbade hopelessness. We must be hopeful to be successful. In contrast negative thinking and loosing hope will make people fighter and terrorist (Interview, March 7, 2016).

From here one can infer that law and order situation is further worsen by pessimist approach. Whereas objectivity, inclusion and optimism

promote peace and security. 'believe me that to wash out negative thoughts and pessimism, teachers' optimistic behaviour and teaching about people of high calibre like Nelson Mandela, who remained optimistic in the time of crisis is more helpful in teaching peace' (Interview, March 4, 2016).

The study found teachers' positive attitude as the most positive technique to teach peace and making the students perspective open and accommodative. There are indeed other factors like, balanced and upgraded curriculum, democratic and peaceful school environment, national stability, equal and merit based economic opportunities that help promote peace in the society. Yet what affects more the mind of the students is teacher as role model. Role of teacher in promoting peace is rightly discussed in the following passage from one of the interviews;

> Without a teacher, who is passionate to inculcate respect, tolerance, acceptance, open mindedness and global values among his/her students every other step is useless. But the said objectives can easily be achieved when a teacher is friendly and conveys the content with a frank attitude. I must say that way of teaching and content collectively meet the demand. Therefore, I am always friendly to my students (Interview, March 10, 2016).

This extract shows that the teachers are aware of their role in peace building and promoting in the society. He argued "A person is guided by his/her thoughts. Therefore, it is important to know what is going on in the mind of one person. Being friend with students, a teacher can read his/her mind" (Interview, March 4, 2016).

Conclusions and implications

The paper explored the utility and need of dialogue for sustainable peace in the schools in Chitral through qualitative case study approach. Teachers and students realize the importance of peace yet had different understanding of the term. The research participants realize the terrible consequences of violence as well as consider dialogue and respect for other views as the key element to create a peaceful society. Interestingly, the schools not only consider dialogue important for peace rather practice it in day-to-day activities believing that it will mould the personality of students in the desired direction. More significantly, it is understood that

dialogue brings flexibility which, in turn, results into acceptance of differences, promoting alternative and thus set a peaceful society.

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