



Al-Azhār

Volume 6, Issue 1 (Jan-June, 2020)

ISSN (Print): 2519-6707



Issue: <https://www.al-azhaar.org/index.php/alazhar/issue/view/2>

URL: <https://www.al-azhaar.org/index.php/alazhar/article/view/557>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46896/alazhr.v6i01.254>

Title

The Role of Higher Education
Institutions in Promoting Peacebuilding
and Coexistence: A Pakistani
Perspective

Author (s): Dr.Naseem Akhter,
Syed Naeem Badshah

Received on: 29 June, 2019

Accepted on: 29 May, 2020

Published on: 25 June, 2020

Citation: Dr. Naseem Akhter, Syed Naeem Badshah
"The Role of Higher Education
Institutions in Promoting Peacebuilding
and Coexistence: A Pakistani Perspective
, " Al-Azhār: 6 no, 1 (2020): 280-287.

Publisher: The University of Agriculture
Peshawar



[Click here for](#)

The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting Peacebuilding and Coexistence: A Pakistani Perspective

**Dr. Naseem Akhter*

***Syed Naeem Badshah*

Abstract

The Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) have presented a formula of acquaintanceship and coexistence for human society that is based upon tolerance, security, and peace. Universities in Pakistan are playing a key role in promoting tolerance, harmony, and peace in society. More than 200 universities used to highlight the vital role of universities in peacebuilding and promoting values of peace, tolerance, co-existence, and harmony among the different segments of society. However, some universities have distinct departments, centres, and clubs dedicated to special research and attention towards peacebuilding and coexistence. HEC, Pakistan, and PHEC are providing full support to universities to promote respect for religions and humanity in society. According to research, almost 136 theses & dissertations have been produced by scholars in a wide range of Pakistani Universities on interfaith Dialogue, religious debates, harmony, and peace. The research also shows that although male teachers are supervising the research related to peace, female teachers have a more positive attitude towards facing the challenging factors for peace development in the universities. Although universities' emphasis laid on an equal social structure for all but still unable to address the nascent challenges that surfaced in the form of violent extremism, sectarianism, intolerance, and lingual discrepancies. The paper aims to attempt to find out the efforts of the HEIs related to peacebuilding, harmony, and coexistence for Pakistani society and recommend more steps for creating a more peaceful environment for a better Pakistan.

Keywords: *Harmony, Pakistan, Peace, Islam, University*

.....
**Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, Pakistan*

*** Chairman, Department of Islamic /Pak. Studies, The University of Agriculture Peshawar*

Introduction:

All people and places experience peace as a result of coexistence. Peace is the term used by international law to describe a situation where there is no war. A society that is free from discrimination and equality, regardless of their creed, religion, race, or colour, can be peaceful (Zahid & Khalid, 2017). The establishment of peace fosters the development of attitudes and encourages tolerance, patience, and respectful acceptance of others' opinions (Farah & Khalid: 2017).

Islam is a religion that upholds and promotes values such as tolerance, peace, and coexistence. "Islam" derives from the Arabic root "S-L-M, "which means peace, submission, and safety". "As-Salaam–Alaikum" (Peace be upon you) is the term commonly used in Islam to signify a peaceful atmosphere that is expected in all interactions. The Holy Qur'an advises its followers to embrace Islam entirely, without any idolatry. The Holy Qur'an says, "O you who have believed, enter into Islam in its entirety, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy." (Qur'an, 2:208).

The Islamic faith promotes inner peace and harmony through the practice of submission to God. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands the people are safe." (Sahih Bukhari). This accentuates the importance of peace in relationships with both God and humanity. The Islamic faith advocates for accepting diversity and respect, affirming that religion is not a burden. The holy Qur'an says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood." (Qur'an, 2:256). "To you be your religion, and to me my religion." (Qur'an, 109:6).

The words promote religious freedom and tolerance, while also acknowledging the importance of non-religious relationships. According to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), individuals who commit the act of killing someone who has a treaty with Muslims will not be welcomed into Paradise (Sahih Bukhari). This reflects the importance of honoring agreements and the sanctity of life, regardless of religious background.

Respect for Human Dignity and the Concept of Brotherhood

Islam emphasizes the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of their background or beliefs. The Holy Qur'an clearly states, "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam..." (Qur'an, 17:70).

According to this religious scripture, the divine value of human life stands without discrimination based upon either religious or ethnic background or social position. According to the Holy Prophet of God, the finest among humanity demonstrate the most beneficial behavior towards others. (Daraqutni). Through this Hadith, Muslims learn to assist others after viewing the person's religion or ancestry because this approach establishes a peaceful environment based on mutual understanding.

Islam establishes that the Islamic belief creates a global brotherhood among Muslims, even though they exist across different ethnicities, social classes and nations, because it extends to all humanity as well. The Holy Qur'an says, "The believers are but brothers..." (Qur'an, 49:10). The verse expresses a supportive bond between believers through the message that believers should assist and work together.

Peaceful Coexistence with Neighbours and Society

The teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasizes the importance of treating neighbours with kindness, regardless of their religious beliefs. "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour." (Sahih Muslim) This teaching highlights how important it is to maintain a harmonious community and social order among neighboring communities. The Prophet's statement to the contrary (Sahih Bukhari) was that he does not believe in filling his stomach when his neighbour is hungry. It teaches us to be compassionate and coexist, even when one does not share the same faith.

The Role of Universities towards Peacebuilding & Co-Existence

The presence of Pakistani universities is essential in fostering interfaith harmony, coexistence, and the promotion of peacebuilding. Due to the significant influence of universities in Pakistan on social norms, attitudes, and behaviors, they possess considerable potential to promote understanding, tolerance, and peaceful interactions among various groups. Several Pakistani universities play important roles in achieving these objectives:

i. Curriculum Development and Educational Programs

The educational institutes throughout Pakistan have admitted peace studies together with conflict resolution approaches and interfaith communication to their academic offerings for improved comprehension of these issues. The educational programs at Quaid-i-Azam University together with Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) provide students with coursework that teaches peace and conflict resolution skills needed for conflict mediation and peaceful dialogue. The education applies a comprehensive approach to discover the roots of both domestic and international disputes before establishing peaceful resolutions. Hussain studies how peace education along with conflict resolution becomes part of Pakistani university learning standards while focusing on Quaid-i-Azam University and Lahore University of Management Sciences (Husson: 2017). Interfaith studies programs at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) together with other universities establish curricula to teach students about various religious traditions along with cultural customs of other communities. This is a result of this. Educational programs establish mutual understanding as well as mutual respect among students who practice different faiths (Ahmed: 2017).

Pakistan's universities organise repetitive occasion discussion sessions and academic forums that gather students and scholars of various religious backgrounds to address

tolerance needs alongside coexistence and peace matters. The University of Punjab in Lahore and Karachi University organize regular seminars and conferences about interfaith relations and tolerance strategies among their students. Religious leaders, along with scholars and students meet at these events to share thoughts about confronting common issues as they create an environment of peaceful relations between various religious communities (Khan & Alam: 2017).

ii. Interfaith Engagement at Pakistani Universities:

Universities in different regions plan interfaith programs featuring religious festivals in addition to lectures and panel events that enhance faith knowledge between religious groups. The initiatives develop a better understanding between people, particularly in communities as different as Pakistan. The universities in Pakistan serve as essential institutions for developing tolerance-based cultures that unite students across every religious background. Since its inception, Aga Khan University in Karachi has maintained a campus environment that accepts students representing Islam Christianity and Hinduism who can unite for mutual respect and peace. The institution works to stimulate diversity growth through support for positive religious relations between different faiths (Mirza: 2017). The educational institutions implement regulations against religious as well as ethnic and gender-based discrimination. The academic environment gives students permission to associate freely with others because they feel secure from discriminatory or biased judgments.

Both the Aga Khan University and the University of Peshawar serve to advance social harmony through mandatory community service requirements for their students. The University, along with the University of Peshawar, runs social harmony initiatives through three key components: interfaith coordination services and outreach to underprivileged populations and interfaith dialogues (Shaha& Memood: 2017). Some institutions function as partners with both government agencies and non-government organizations to establish peaceful regions within conflict zones of Pakistan (Qureshi: 2017).

iii. Religious Tolerance and Respect

Several universities, including Lahore's University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and Aga Khan University, hold interfaith prayer sessions where students from different faiths gather to share their spiritual beliefs. The sessions encourage greater comprehension and respect for the various spiritual traditions present at the university (Rashid: 2016). Religious scholars from various religions frequently attend universities to discuss topics of concern concerning peace, tolerance, and coexistence. These scholars present a viewpoint that is grounded in their religious practices, emphasising shared values such as justice, compassion, and peace, while also exploring how university programs and activities promote Islamic values of tolerance and coexistence (Rehman: 2017). Many universities have student clubs and organizations that

emphasize peacebuilding and tolerance. The clubs arrange meetings, talks, and activities to alleviate sectarian ties while also advocating for student inclusivity. A club called "Peace and Tolerance" is run by LUMS to promote social harmony (Khan: 2017). Certain universities have cross-disciplinary teams that bring together students from various faiths to engage in projects, community outreach efforts, or dialogue events. Through these connections, misconceptions are reduced and interactions between students of different faiths can be facilitated (Alam: 2017).

Iv. International Collaborations and Exchange Programs

International cooperation and exchange programs are conducted by Pakistan's universities to facilitate communication between students and their cultural and religious counterparts. In Pakistan, universities that are affiliated with the country's national and international institutions offer exchange programs for their students to learn about different cultures. The programs facilitate student exposure to diverse cultures and religions, promoting interfaith harmony and global peace (Ali & Nisar: 2017). All of the above statements are from Saudi Arabia. LUMS, Quaid-i-Azam University and other universities regularly convene or participate in global conferences on international peace and interfaith harmony that bring together scholars and students from various regions to discuss practical ways of spreading peace in their respective nations.

Challenges of Hurdles

Universities play a crucial role in shaping future leaders, thinkers, and contributors to society. However, they also face a range of challenges and hurdles in fostering peace and harmony. Universities often host diverse student populations from various backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems. This diversity can lead to ideological conflicts, misunderstandings, and tension between students with differing worldviews. The study found cultural barriers, a lack of communication skills, a lack of awareness about peace; pressure groups and peer groups, and injustice are the challenging themes for the universities (Naz and Khurshid: 2017). Such differences, if not managed properly, may lead to divisions, discrimination, or even conflict, undermining the goal of fostering a harmonious environment. Also, students belonging to rigid families act depressingly with their fellows, some teachers hold biased attitudes and behave negatively with the students (Naz, Khurshid & Iqbal: 2017). Many universities face budgetary constraints that can limit the resources available for peace-building initiatives, counselling services, diversity programs, and other efforts to promote harmony. Insufficient resources can hinder the implementation of programs that address the above challenges and undermine the overall goal of creating a peaceful, inclusive environment. Limited funding can prevent universities from implementing the necessary programs for diversity, conflict resolution, and peace-building (Cheng & Nordland, 2013). Universities should seek partnerships, grants, and alternative funding

mechanisms to sustain peace-building programs (Terenzini et al., 1996). The results of some study concluded that negative mutual images, ignoring commonalities, non-friendly relations, distrust, fear, hate, anger, hopelessness, negative attitude towards peace process, unpleasant events, untrained teachers, biased teachers, stereotypes, discrimination, and narrow minds are the hurdles in promoting peace activities (Zahid & Khalid: 2017).

Religious conflicts are also a core cause and hurdle in the way of sustainable peace and can even lead to segregation, intolerance, and even violent incidents in universities due to diverse religious beliefs and tensions between different faith groups can arise, especially if students feel that their religious values are under attack or misunderstood. Universities may experience tensions between different religious groups, especially when beliefs and practices are perceived as conflicting or incompatible (Abdalla et al., 2001). Disagreement over values, customs, and practices can disrupt campus harmony, leading to exclusion or even violent confrontations (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). University leaders should work collaboratively with faculty, staff, and students to create clear policies and structures that support peace and harmony across campus. Inequalities based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability can perpetuate discrimination and hinder the creation of a harmonious campus environment (Harper, 2012). Emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is essential in creating a space where all students can thrive (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Conclusion

The universities in Pakistan are becoming more involved in promoting interfaith harmony, tolerance, and peace. They play a key role in creating societal harmony by encouraging inclusive education, interfaith communication, community service, and religious tolerance. Students, faculty, and institutions work together to reduce sectarian tensions, foster mutual understanding, promote unity, establish better conditions for all parties, and maintain a more positive atmosphere both within the university campus and beyond. Additionally, Universities' contribution to fostering a culture of peace today is crucial in shaping the leaders of tomorrow who will spread the message of coexistence, mutual respect, and social justice. The above examples demonstrate how Pakistani universities are participating in efforts to foster peacebuilding, coexistence, and interfaith harmony. They stress the importance of university curricula, student organizations, community outreach, and international collaborations in fostering a peaceful and inclusive society. The mentioned books, papers, and studies are crucial in comprehending the various endeavours and achievements in promoting peaceful cohabitation across Pakistan's diverse social and religious landscape.

Recommendations

Universities should prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, ensuring that all students feel valued and respected.

It is important to encourage intercultural dialogue, inclusive curricula, and programs that promote mutual respect and understanding. Universities must promote critical thinking and global awareness, enabling students to engage in constructive and respectful interactions with the world.

It is necessary for universities to have clear policies and support systems that prevent violence, encourage conflict resolution, and promote non-violent communication.

Interfaith dialogues, workshops, and religious freedom initiatives can promote mutual respect and understanding among students of varying faiths.

Funding for programs that promote inclusivity and peace should be the primary focus of universities, which may also seek external funding sources such as grants or partnerships with organizations that support global peace. The government, particularly the HEC and PHEC's can allocate funds to universities to promote a culture of peace and provide guidelines and baseline indicators to both departments and national levels for sustainable peace-building.

References:

- Abdalla, M. A., & King, R. (2001). Interfaith dialogue in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of College and Character*, 2(3), 9-16.
- Ahmed, F. (2017). "Interfaith Dialogue and Education for Peace in Pakistan." *Journal of Interreligious Studies*.
- Ali, T., & Nisar, S. (2017). "International Collaborations and Exchange Programs for Peacebuilding in Pakistani Universities." *Global Studies in Education*.
- Alam, N. (2017). "Interfaith Student Associations and their Role in Peacebuilding." *Religious Studies and Peacebuilding*.
- Cheng, M., & Nordland, S. (2013). Financial constraints and university effectiveness. *Journal of Higher Education Policy*, 26(4), 123-139.
- Farah L N., and Khalid K. (2017). Transformation of Peace Culture is a Challenge for Universities in Pakistan: A Mix method Study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)* Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017), pp. 289-297
- Gurin, P., Dey, E. L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 330-366.
- Harper, S. R. (2012). Race and gender in the college experience. *The Journal of College Student Development*, 53(6), 804-818.
- Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C. L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2012). A model for diverse learning environments. In M. D. Young (Ed.), *Handbook of research on higher education* (pp. 29-56). Springer.
- Hussain, S. (2017). "Fostering Peace through Education: A Case Study of Pakistani Universities." *International Journal of Peace Studies*.
- Khan, M. A., & Alam, S. (2017). "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue in Pakistani Universities." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Khan, H. (2017). "The Role of Student Organizations in Promoting Peace in Pakistani Universities." *Journal of Peace Studies*.

- Mirza, R. (2017). "Interfaith Engagement in Pakistani Universities: Challenges and Opportunities." *Religious Studies Review*.
- Naz, F. L., Khurshid, K., & Iqbal, J. (2017). Hurdles in the Transformation of Peace Process: Indicators for Universities in Pakistan. *sjesr*, 4(2), 222-230
- Naz, F. L., & Khurshid, K. (2017). Transformation of Peace Culture is a Challenge for Universities in Pakistan: A Mix method Study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(2), 289-297.
- Rehman, S. (2017). "Islamic Principles of Tolerance and Religious Coexistence in Pakistani Universities." *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*.
- Rashid, H. (2016). "Fostering Religious Tolerance at LUMS: A Case Study." *Journal of Higher Education in Pakistan*.
- Shah, Z., & Mehmood, T. (2017). "Peacebuilding and Social Responsibility in Pakistani Universities." *Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice*.
- Qureshi, F. (2017). "Volunteerism and Peacebuilding in Pakistani Universities." *International Peace Review*.
- Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E. T., & Blimling, G. S. (1996). Students' out-of-class experiences and their influence on learning and cognitive development: A literature review. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(3), 167-177.
- Zahid, H. (2017). "Promoting Peace Through Student Exchange Programs: The Role of Pakistani Universities." *Peace Studies Quarterly*.