

## Exploring the Conceptual Understanding of Peace in School Students

Muhammad Nasir Khan<sup>1\*</sup>, Masood Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Zahida Parveen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Islamic University, Islamabad; <sup>2</sup>Post Graduate Vaqr-Un-Nisa College, Rawalpindi

\*Email: nasiriu786@gmail.com

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### Abstract

This paper aims to explore the conceptual understanding of peace in elementary school students which they have learned through school curriculum at their respective schools. Conceptual understanding of peace of students indicates the clarity in the peace promoting objectives in the school education policies and practices. The study in fact meets the gaps in the procedure to promote peaceful thinking in the students. Participants have been included from the public sector elementary schools. For the cross verification of collected data from the students, school educators have also been included in the participants. The study justifies the future need of further addition and revision of theoretical and practical content on peace in the school curriculum. Convenient sampling technique was used in the selection of sampling. The collected data have been analyzed on the basis of grounded theory. The results of the study are significant to the school education policy makers with the understanding of concluded needs in the revision of content on peace in the school curriculum. The study concluded that students have conceptual understanding of peace. However, the participants recommended the addition of text-book on peace elementary school curriculum for the prominent understanding of nature, characteristics and practices of peace in the students.

**Keywords:** Conceptual understanding, school students, peaceful thinking, school curriculum, education policies

### Introduction

The definition of peace generally includes the elimination of all forms of violence from someone. For this, it is important to assess the social conditions under which violence can be made absent from someone personality (Galtung, 1981). The notion of perpetual peace was introduced by Immanuel Kant in seventeenth century However, formal work on peace education started after the World War II when the United Nations made attentions of the people towards peace (Mumtaz, 2019,p-5).

Peace can be achieved by the efforts of people individually and socially ( Bansikiza, 2004). People needs to know peace as an integral part of life (Harris, 2004). “Establishing lasting peace is the work of education, all politics can do is keep us away from war (Montessori 1949, p. viii)”. Maria Montessori explores the significant connection between peace education and early childhood education (Ferber, 2018, p-12). Aims and objectives of peace education includes to teach violent managing skills to promote peace (Mishra, 2015). Peace education looks to be effective when peace and conflict resolution skills are actively taught at schools (Baldo & Fumiss ,1998).

Peace educators plays significant role in promoting the concept of peace in the students (Brock-Utne, 1989). Teachers should be guided professional and teaching the problem solving techniques (Daniel Gartrell, 2001).The most effective strategy for promoting peace is the integration of peace education with mainstreaming school(Zahoor,2017,p-3). Peace educators adopt different strategies to address the violence that is threat for humanity (Mumtaz, 2019, p-30). Teachers need

training that is essential to internalize the required values and attitudes that play central role in promoting peace (Bray & Joubert, 2007). In schools, teaching peace includes non-violence, human rights and social justice (Smith, 2004). Therefore, peace education is not only concerned with education about peace but education for peace as well (Hicks, 1996). UNICEF defines peace education as, “the promotion of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values” to create behavioral change in children, young people, and grown-ups, in order to prevent overt as well as structural conflict and violence. Peace education allows individuals to peacefully solve conflict and to help create peaceful conditions at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or global levels” (United Nations, 1998).

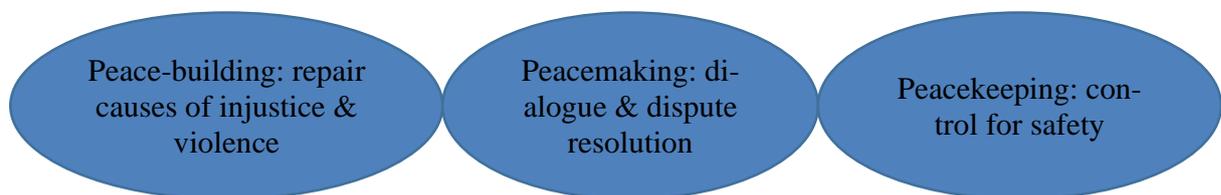
Teaching of peace education reduces the aggressive tendencies in the students and promotes the vision of peace. Teaching peace education also enhances the anger management and decision making of students (Harris, 2003). Training programs on peace should be included as regular courses. Training programs on peace education can be integrated with the academic curriculum and can also be taught as individual course. (Damirchi & Bilge, 2014). The major obstacle in achieving the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals is the existence of violence in schools (UNESCO, 2011). Therefore, researcher decided to find out the conceptual understanding of peace in the students so that the intensity of violence can be identified. The reason is violence in schools contributes in poor performance of students and promotes anxiety in the students as well (Harris, 1996). Resolving of conflicts is an intellectual process of handling the conflicts (Albert, 2005). Conflict resolution is to do efforts to overcome the gaps in resolving the conflicts (Wallenstein, 2002). Therefore, for the positive change in the society and development, education must be focused. Education is the agent to overcome the violent and aggressive attitude of the individuals (UNICEF, 2011).

### ***Problem of the Research***

The objectives of school curriculum and policies include promoting peaceful thinking in the new generation. It’s essential to identify that to what extent curriculum and education policies are successful in promoting the peaceful thinking in the students. For this, conceptual understanding of peace in the students is needed to explore. Therefore, this study explores the conceptual understanding of students concerning peace. The study is beneficial in comprehending the vision of peace in school students.

### ***Teaching Peace in Schools-A General Overview***

Schools promote conflict resolution in three basic methods including peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-building (Harris, 1996). Bickmore (2011) elaborated three approaches to managing conflict in the given diagram:



**Figure 1. Three approaches to managing conflict: Lived citizenship education practices (Source: Bickmore, 2011, p-43).**

Hunter (2008) shared experience in the article, “Creating a culture of peace in the elementary classroom”. He mentioned that three step process for problem solving was taught including i. teaching students to cool down when angry. ii. asking students to discuss and to express their feelings on any event. iii. Solving your problem together. Peace education shifts the pedagogical practices of the

educator, the curriculum, the environment, and reconceptualizes the educational system as a whole. The aims and objectives of peace education includes to equip students with essential knowledge of social ethics and cooperative strategies (Deveci, Yilmaz, Kardag, 2008). The focus of peace building is to cultivate mutual respect and social justice (Bekerman, 2005). Schools and families are the major institutions in the society to learn love and peace. At these both institutions, teaching cooperative environment and conflict management skills promote peaceful living among the children (Deutsch, 1993).



**Figure 2. Framework of Education of Peace Education and Its Co-Disciplines**  
(Source: Bajaj & Chiu, 2009,p-444).

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the State”. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Founder of Pakistan) address to first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, August 11, 1947. The National Education Policy 2009 elaborates that; “The National Education Policy 2009 sets the vision for the holistic development of students in education by stating: “Our education system must provide quality education to our children and youth to enable them to realize their individual potential and contribute to development of society and nation, creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.”. One of the major barriers in promoting peace education in Pakistan is that the country has three education systems. These systems includes public sector, private sector and religious institutions (Zahoor, 2017,p-3). “Teachers must be trained to make students responsible and creative. Pupils must be able to develop values and attitudes like cooperation, solidarity and autonomy at school. Teaching how to understand conflicts and similarities amongst fellow students is essential. Children must put themselves in other’s shoes prior to judging fellow being’s actions”.Qazi, N, Ahmed (2018, August 13, Daily Pakistan).

#### ***Teaching Peace in Schools in Pakistan***

A study conducted in Pakistan concluded that, “majority of the respondents disagreed to the statement that peace education formally existed in our education system of Pakistan. It was concluded that peace education did not exist formally in our education system” (Iqbal, 2016, p-146).

This study also concluded that, “It was found out that the educators were sensitive about the social conflicts resolution and peace-building programs”. Another study conducted in Pakistan on the perceptions of school teachers on conflict resolution skills concluded that, “Social conflicts resolution education did not exist formally in our education system. It is thus recommended that the textbooks and syllabus for the school level should be rationalized and re-organized to manifest the concerns that conflict resolution education is needed” (Iqbal, Khalil & Khan, 2017, 168).

### **Research Questions**

The main research question is concerning the exploration of conceptual understanding of peace in elementary school students while the sub-question is to make recommendations to enhance the conceptual understanding of peace through curriculum and teachers.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Research Design***

Qualitative approach, through intensive unstructured interviews and observations was used with the research participants and their respective school contexts, and ultimately allowed us to acquire rich data about peace education. Qualitative research approaches includes an “interpretivist position” (Mason, 2002). Quantitative methods provide extensive picture when used to collect data on behavior (Kielmann et al, 2012, p-8). Coding has been done of the collected data on the basis of Grounded Theory. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and / or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldhana, 2012). The qualitative research is concerned with values, beliefs and motives which relates to relationships to the operationalization of variables (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative researchers have interest in exploring the beliefs of the people. This research is not concerned with statistical analysis (Brink, 1993). The goal of the qualitative research is to find out the in-depth comprehension of the existing situation (Domholdt, 1993).

#### ***Participants***

Keeping in view objectives of the study, elementary school students were selected for the interviews. For the cross verification, teachers teaching to the selected students were also included in the sample of the study. Convenient sampling technique was used in the selection of participants. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where participants meet certain criteria (Dörnyei, Z, 2007). The criteria for the selection of participants was public sector elementary school students in urban areas of Punjab province of Pakistan. The schools included in the sample of the study were public sector elementary schools that were randomly selected in District Jhang of Punjab province of Pakistan. In qualitative research, interviews are used to track the meanings of central themes. The major objective in interviewing is to comprehend the meaning of what the interviewees is going to say (McNamara, 2009). Therefore, unstructured interview was used as a tool in collecting data for the in-depth understanding the meaning of peace in the vision of elementary school students. An unstructured interview is concerned with open ended questions (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Interviews have been broadly used for the collection of data (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003).

#### ***Data Collection and Management***

For the collection of data, convenient sampling technique was used. Secondary school students and teachers in the public sector secondary schools were consulted. Fifteen schools were selected in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Permission for the interview was taken from the competent authority of school education department (Chief Executive Officer). The students were briefed about the nature of interviews before the start of formal interview. All the interviews were recorded and were taken in national language (Urdu). Data was managed school wise. Students’ interviews

with their respective teachers were recorded and saved electronically. Unstructured interviews were conducted. Participants were introduced about the structure of interview. The interviews were conducted in during the recess timing in the working days of schools.

### Results

The collected data were analyzed on the basis of grounded theory. Themes of the collected data were analyzed in the form of open and axial coding. For the purpose of understanding the social phenomena, grounded theory as a qualitative research method is used (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Bowers 1988). In the qualitative research, the analysis process involves organizing data, breaking it down and synthesizing it (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). After the data analysis, it has been found that majority of the students could define the nature and characteristics of peace. Majority of the participants were agreed that text-books of social sciences promotes the conceptual understanding of peace in the students. Majority of the participants were agreed that teachers delivered lectured on promoting peace and tolerance in the society. Majority of the participants were agreed that school discipline enhanced the conceptual understanding of the students. Majority of the participants (teachers) were agreed that separate text-book on peace must be included in the secondary school curriculum.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The participants were in opinion that textbooks promote the concept of peace. One participant shared that, *“lessons of Islamic studies and social sciences enhance the concept of peace”*. Similarly, other participants briefed that, *“In Urdu as a subject, we learn message of peace in the lessons”*. Peace education as the aspect of formal and non-formal education which takes place inside school and out-side school to eliminate violence in students (Nsikak-Abasi & Nneji, 2010). The student participants were in opinion that teachers delivered lectures on peaceful coexistence and peace building in the society. One student participant shared that, *“our teacher of Pakistan Studies delivers lectures on social ethics including justice, peace, harmony and peace-building in the society”*. Teachers are expected to be role model in promoting interpersonal relationships including tolerance, recognition and respect in students (Horner et al, 2015). Dulnuan, W. (2015) analyzed the importance of peace education importance in the form of building capabilities to sustain peace in their families and communities. Sampere (2016) determines that peace education is the effort to tackle violence among the people. Teachers in this study were in opinion that textbooks of social sciences were promoting peaceful thinking in the students. One participant shared that, *“Textbook of Islamic Studies has peace promoting content and has significant impact on the thinking of the students”*. Another participant shares that, *“Although the textbooks of social sciences have important role in promoting peaceful thinking in the students but a separate book on peace will be vital addition in the curriculum of secondary school”*. Therefore, peace teaching should be essential part of the school curriculum. However, it’s also important to find out the vision of the students concerning the peace to assess the implementation of peace policies. The central role education of education includes peace initiative but it looks to be a global challenge (Tina, 2016). Sakade (2009) elaborates that teaching peace in schools faces challenges like lack of resources.

The study concludes that school climate promotes conceptual understanding of peace in the students. The participants agreed that text-books have a vital role in promoting the concept of peace in the students. The participants agreed to include text-book on peace at elementary school level for the prominent understanding of nature and characteristics and practices of peace in the students. Students can well define and elaborate peace. Text-books of social sciences have a vital role in promoting the conceptual understanding of peace in the students. Teachers and school climate have a

significant role in promoting the concept of peace in the students as well. A text-book on peace has been recommended by the teachers to be taught at elementary school level as a compulsory subject.

### **Recommendations**

A study can be conducted on the perceptions of parents of secondary school students concerning the peace practices. Parents play a vital role in developing the personality of their children. Therefore, it's important to find out the vision of the parents concerning their training for children to promote peaceful thinking and practices in the students. In the rural areas, it's need of the day to explore the perceptions of parents towards their peace promoting strategies for their children because of the illiteracy of the parents. Similarly, a study can be conducted on the gaps in education policies and practices to promote peace in the new generation in the schools. Policies indicate the peace education through textbooks and teacher training programs although school teachings and practices of the students represent gaps in the implementation of education policies concerning peace. Therefore, it's need of the day to explore these gaps that are existing in the form of school teaching and teacher training programs.

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