

Educating Women's Rights through Teacher Education in Pakistan: Reality or Paradox

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Abstract

Major aim of the study was to check the role of teacher training institutions in disseminating awareness of women's rights in Pakistan. Awareness and participation of future teachers in feminist activities was also questioned through the study. The preparedness of prospective teachers to join women's rights movement in Pakistan was also examined. A close ended questionnaire was developed to search the answers of research questions. Viewing the time constraints, the study was delimited only to three public sector university campuses/departments in Punjab (Pakistan). Findings revealed unorganized awareness of women's rights among prospective teachers. Commitment of the respondents and departmental efforts to promote their dedication with women's rights movement were also weak. Inclusion of women's rights as a separate subject in teacher education curricula was recommended in the study. Enhanced role of teacher training institutions and women's rights activists to raise awareness and commitment of the future teachers was also suggested.

Key Words: teacher education; freedom of expression, harassment

Introduction

Respect for women is a mark of civilized nations. In Pakistan, women form forty eight percent of population. Movement for women's rights in Pakistan has significant history. From signing universal declaration of human rights 1948 to the approval of "protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010, there is a continuous struggle of Pakistani civil society and human's rights activists to provide a friendly and supportive environment to women from all segments of society. Campaign of women's rights, in Pakistan, can be highlighted in two spheres. First direction of the movement for women's rights in the country is toward legislation and its implementation to ensure equal legal

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rights for women of all segments of society. Secondly, women's rights activists are concerned to enhance awareness of women's rights in the society. Though, both attempts are essential to make women's lives more secure and prosperous however increased awareness of women's legal, social, economic and fundamental rights widely influences the lives of common women in the country (Chaudhry, 2004).

Khan (2009), in a report, examines different dimensions of women's rights movement in Pakistan. She highlights constitutional, legal, financial and social progress of the country to ensure women's human rights. Barriers in this regard are also discussed in her report. She describes poverty, violence and conflicts (local and regional) as reasons for terrible condition of women's rights in Pakistan. Ali, Fani, Afzal and Yasin (2010) have conducted a research investigating cultural barriers in women empowerment in a district of southern Punjab. They explore the restrictions imposed by family and society on women's decision making process. As a part of their study, they examine the awareness of common people regarding women's human rights and find it inappropriate. Chaudhry (2004) studies the violence against women in district Toba Tek singh of Punjab, Pakistan. He argues in favor of education to alleviate violence against women. A reason of expanding violence against women, according to him, is lack of awareness of women's rights. Findings of Abrar & Ghouri (2010) endorse the conclusions of Chaudhry. Abrar and Ghouri analyze the violence against women in rural and urban contexts. They recommend support for developing environment of awareness toward women's rights in the society.

Positive relationship between higher education and women's awareness of their rights is proved by Yasmeen (2005) and Malik and Courtney (2011). Their research focuses on university education and derives findings from the experiences of female university teachers and students. However, the researchers generalize the findings and conclude that higher education is a major source for developing empowerment in women. The study of Babur (2007) is more elaborative and explorative. He discusses the theoretical provisions and actual existence of social, legal, financial and fundamental rights of women in

Pakistan. His study underlines various forms of violence and discrimination in Pakistani society i.e. honor killing, dowry system, bride burning, acid throwing, harassment at work place etc. Findings of Babur suggest enhanced role of Government, media and international community to eliminate violence and discrimination against women in Pakistani society. He determines education a major source for change. Education brings political, economic, social, cultural, religious and environmental consciousness and prosperity. Education delivers awareness of rights and obligations. The studies of Abrar & Ghouri (2010), Babur (2007), Malik and Courtney (2011), and Yasmeen (2005), also, argue in favor of education as best mean to raise awareness of women's rights in the society.

Allana, Asad, and Sherali (2010) analyze models of teacher training designed to increase awareness of social and gender related issues among prospective teachers. In conclusion they urge to raise teachers' awareness of social and gender related issues. Teachers occupy important place in all levels of education. Their views and experiences influence fresh minds of students. The current study was aimed to explore the mindset of future teachers about women's rights. Teachers' intellectual understanding and acceptance is essential to deliver any message to students. The study attempted to collect and explore information about the awareness and commitment of prospective teachers with the women's rights movement in Pakistan. It helped the researchers to portray a relationship between teacher education and the movement.

Objectives of the Study

Contemporary research presents unsatisfactory results for the situation of women's human rights in Pakistan. Though there is a progress in legal reforms but the situation in social areas is still pathetic (Abrar & Ghouri, 2010; Ali, Fani, Afzal & Yasin, 2010; Mullally, 2005). There is a need to raise awareness and knowledge as well as create respect for women's rights among masses so that the behaviors of common people can be accordingly developed. Teachers can play significant role to achieve this target. But here the question rises whether teachers are prepared to meet this challenge or not. The current study was to

answer this question. Major objectives of the study were to confirm the awareness of women's rights among prospective teachers and their commitment with the movement of women's rights in Pakistan. Institutional efforts to promote awareness of women's right among student teachers were also examined in the study. Comparison between the views of female and male future teachers was also helpful to explore their perspective and affiliation with the movement.

Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives, four research questions were formulated. Focus of the research questions were to gather three type of information i.e. awareness, attitude and participation in activities of women's rights in the country. The study attempted to answer the following research questions.

- 1) To what extent, prospective teachers are aware of women's rights?
- 2) To what extent, the prospective teachers are committed with the movement for women's rights in Pakistan?
- 3) How much efforts the teacher education institutions are making to promote awareness of women's rights among prospective teachers?
- 4) How much the female student teachers are different from their male fellows in their views about women's rights?

Research Methodology

The study was aimed to explore the views and engagement of future teachers with the movement of women's rights in Pakistan. Johnson & Christenson (2010) describe that the research with a purpose to provide accurate description or picture of the status or characteristics of a situation or phenomenon is non-experimental descriptive research. They recommend survey method of data collection for gathering information about awareness, attitudes, and demographics. Following the Johnson and Christenson, survey

method was used to collect data. A 15 items close ended questionnaire was developed after a thoughtful review of related literature. The focus of the items of instrument was to collect information that might be helpful in answering the research questions. Seven questions were to collect information regarding participants' awareness of women's rights. Three questions were intended to analyze respondents' attitude toward movement of women rights in Pakistan and last five questions were to explore the role of teacher training institutions to increase awareness and partnership of prospective teachers in this regard. Content-related evidence of validity i.e. content, format, appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the instrument as well as construct-related evidence of the instrument validity i.e. clarity of research objectives and clear description of research questions was ensured consulting five senior educationists and researchers.

Table 01. Sample Distribution (N=156)

Sr.#	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
01	Females	120	76.9
02	Enrolled in M.A. Education	66	42.3
03	Enrolled in M.Ed.	33	21.2
04	Enrolled in B.Ed.	57	36.5
05	Studying in Second Semester	110	70.5
06	Studying in Fourth Semester	46	29.5
07	Previously Master Degree Holders	24	15.4

The population of the study was consisted of all students enrolled in teacher training Institutions in Punjab. However, viewing the constraints of time, it was delimited only to three departments/institutions of teacher training functioning in District Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahawalpur. The both are among the districts having low literacy rates in Punjab. The departments included in the study belong to public sector and offer post graduate teacher education. Total strength of the institutions in three courses i.e. M.A. Education, M.Ed. and B.Ed. was reported 1030 students. Fifteen percent of population was randomly

selected as sample. The Researchers personally visited the campuses and gathered the data. Sample distribution according to gender, course, semester, and previous qualification was as shown in table 01.

Findings of the Study

Collected data was tabulated and recorded in SPSS files. It was analyzed using simple percentage method. Key findings are described here.

- 1- Data reveal sound awareness of women’s rights among prospective teachers. Eighty three percent of the respondents, as showed in table 02, claim that they know about the women’s rights.

Table 02. Awareness (N=156)

Sr.#	Statements	No		Yes	
		f	%	f	%
01	Awareness of women’s rights	27	17	129	83
02	Awareness of the movement of women’s rights in Pakistan	37	24	119	76
03	Awareness of the objectives of the movement	49	31	107	67
04	Awareness of Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961	123	79	33	21
05	Awareness of the contents of MFLO 1961	123	79	33	21
06	Awareness of Protection against Harassment Act 2010	119	76	37	24
07	Awareness of the contents of the Act	131	84	25	16

Similarly, majority (76%) of the respondents knows about the movement of women’ rights in Pakistan whereas the awareness level of objectives of the movement is lower than former (67%). The situation is alarming regarding the awareness of women’s legal rights among prospective teachers. Majority of respondents declares themselves unaware of Muslim family Law Ordinance (MFLO) 1961 and Protection against Harassment of

Women at Workplace Act 2010. Similar opinions are provided for the contents of these acts.

- 2- Next concern is about the attitude of prospective teachers toward the movement of women' rights in Pakistan. Table 03 provides pathetic results in this regard.

Table 03. Attitudes (N=156)

Sr.#	Statements	No		Yes	
		f	%	f	%
01	Agree with objectives of women's rights movement	74	47	82	53
02	Membership of any women's rights organization	124	80	32	20
03	Participation in women's rights activities	106	68	50	32

When prospective teachers are asked whether they are agree with the objectives of the movement for women's rights in Pakistan, forty seven percent declare themselves disagree. Similarly, eighty percent of respondents have no membership of any organization working for women's rights in Pakistan. Majority respondents (68%) never participate in any activity designed for the favor of women's rights in the country.

- 3- Role of teacher training institutions to raise awareness and commitment of prospective teachers for promoting women's rights in the country is important.

Table 04. Role of Teacher Training Institutions (N=156)

Sr.#	Statements	No		Yes	
		f	%	f	%
01	Institution designs activities of women's rights	86	55	70	45
02	Inclusion of Women's rights in curricula	34	22	122	78
03	Respect for females in Teacher Education Institutions	50	32	106	68
04	Freedom of Expression for females in the institutions	41	26	115	74
05	Respect of females by their male fellows	65	42	91	58

Fifty five percent prospective teachers deny that their institutions design activities to raise their awareness and commitment toward women’s rights. Seventy eights percent future teachers propose the inclusion of women’s rights as a subject in teacher education curricula. Majority respondents opine that their institutions offer due respect and freedom of expression to their female students.

Table 05. Respect of Female Students by Male Fellows (N=156)

Sr.#	Gender	No		Yes	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
01	Female respondents	60	50	60	50
02	Male respondents	05	14	31	86

Simple majority also accept that male students conduct respectfully with their female fellows. However the opinions of only female students are alarming where fifty percent female students deny the described statement (Table: 05). Results on the issue of agree with objectives of the movement of women’s rights are also unexpected (Table: 06).

Table 06. Agree with Objectives of the Movement of Women’s Rights (N=156)

Sr.#	Gender	No		Yes	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
01	Female respondents	56	47	64	53
02	Male respondents	18	50	18	50

Table 06 reveals that fifty percent of male future teachers are disagree with objectives of the movement of women’s rights in Pakistan. Opinions of female prospective teachers are no more different. Forty seven percent female respondents declare themselves disagree with the objectives.

Discussion

Data present thought provoking results. Students of teacher education institutions are future teachers. It is a good trend that sharp majority has awareness of women's rights. Similarly awareness of the women's rights movement and its objectives also shows better development, however need of further improvement cannot be neglected. The situation becomes worse when the respondents are asked to tell about their awareness of legal rights of women in Pakistan. The respondents are asked about two legislative provisions in this regard, Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961, and Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010. It is pathetic that more than 3/4th of the prospective teachers deny the awareness of the acts and their contents. It can be derived that respondents' claim of having knowledge of women's rights and the movement is superficial and unorganized. Since Yasmeen (2005) and Malik & Courtney (2011) have proved positive relationship between higher education and women's empowerment. The findings of current study provide different results. Among the sample, fifteen percent respondents are already master degree holders and remaining are graduates. In teacher education, sixty three percent respondents are enrolled in master program and remaining in bachelor program. Poor knowledge of women's legal rights among such high profile sample raises questions on higher education system of the country.

Attitudes of prospective teachers toward the movement of women's rights in Pakistan are also no more different. Accumulatively, simple majority of respondents state themselves agree with the objectives of the movement. It is interesting that though the opinions of male respondents are equally split but the results of female respondents are also balanced. Only fifty three percent female future teachers describe themselves agree with the objectives of the movement whereas forty seven percent deny their acceptance. Their memberships and participation in activities of women's rights depict worrisome results. Eighty percent prospective teachers have no membership of any organization working for women's rights and sixty eight percent never participate in any activity designed to

promote women's rights movement in the country. This situation indicates toward a gap waiting for the attention of women's rights activists. Engagements of future teachers in the movement will, not only, utilize their potentials for the cause but will open the door for future generation to join the struggle. It can be assumed that one reason of this lower participation may be the lower level of knowledge of rights and the movement. Further research can portray comprehensive and evidence based picture in this regard.

Describing the institutional efforts and environment for women rights, majority respondents deny the designing of awareness raising activities. However majority respondents also accept that teacher training institutions offer due respect and freedom of expression to their female students. Although simple majority of respondents accept that male students conduct with their female fellows respectfully however fifty percent female future teachers negate this statement. A positive opinion reveals in the data is to refine teacher education curricula. More than 3/4th of respondents propose inclusion of women's rights in teacher education curricula. It indicates that despite all discussed factors future teachers are aware of the importance of women's rights and they want to further learn about the issue.

Conclusions

After a profound discussion, the study concludes following important points to understand the issue. It is derived that although prospective teachers claim the awareness of women's rights and the movement of women's rights however their lack of knowledge about various legal women's rights questions their awareness. It is necessary to provide them fresh, comprehensive and organized knowledge. Workshops, seminars and short courses can provide required information. Another solution the study suggests is inclusion of a new subject in teacher education curricula. The new subject must aim to deliver knowledge of human and women's rights to prospective teachers.

University students especially student teachers play an extensive role in society. They have ability to influence a wide range of students in their professional lives. Data reveal their limited participation in women's rights activities during pre-service professional education. The study proposes active role of women's right activists to raise awareness and commitments of them. Women's rights organizations and teacher training institutions should offer individual and group activities to their students in this regard. It will not only enhance their awareness and commitment but train them also to continue the movement in their future lives. Though majority respondents state the environment of the institutions friendly however it is not completely satisfactory. Low gap among the percentages of respondents' opinions argues to improve the existing teacher education structure offering more dignity, respect and freedom of expression to their female students.

It is found that significant proportion of prospective teachers including forty seven percent of female respondents declare themselves disagree with the objectives of women's rights movement in Pakistan. This study recommends further research to investigate the reasons of this disagreement. It is already known that females in Pakistan especially of underdeveloped areas are victims of various forms of violence (Abrar & Ghouri, 2010; Ali, Fani, Afzal & Yasin, 2010; Mullally, 2005). In this situation, silence of Pakistani educated women, that is going to be the teacher in future, raises questions. Proposed research will find out the factors influencing opinions of educated women in this regard.

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