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Article:	The Role of Youth from Diversified Cultural groups in Peace Building: Insights from the Fellowship Program on Peaceful Coexistence 2021, at University of Peshawar
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ABSTRACT

The University of Peshawar, Department of Philosophy in collaboration with the Mirror of Society, a youth magazine and with the support of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) organized a fellowship program on Peaceful Coexistence. The participants were from the different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with diversified educational backgrounds and knowledge expertise. This research study was carried out, based on the responses of the participants of fellowship program. In this study, the participants of the fellowship program were asked close-ended questions. The questionnaire was emailed to the participants, of which 45 percent filled and sent back the questionnaire. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the findings with the existing body of knowledge on peaceful coexistence. The results show that regardless of age, gender, department, affiliation, and diversified background, they were committed to peacebuilding, tolerance, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. The recommendation from this study is that in future young people with less or no formal education may be accessed of their understanding of the concept of peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Youth, Tolerance, Peaceful Coexistence, Peace Building

Introduction

In July 2021 Department of Philosophy, University of Peshawar in collaboration with the Mirror of Society, a youth magazine and with the support of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), organized a fellowship program under the theme, “Promoting Peaceful Co-Existence”. The fellowship program consisted of two phases; a class room training and briefings at SahibZada Abdul Qayyum Museum Hall, University of Peshawar, where experts from distinguished organizations were invited for expressing their views on peace building. The second phase took place at Bara Gali Summer Camp, Sub Campus University of Peshawar, where the fellows presented their views on tolerance, diversity and peace building. For the presentations, the fellows were divided into a group of 3 member’s team.

The fellowship program was unique in the sense that the participants were selected from different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with diverse educational backgrounds. Diversity itself is one of the integral factors for peaceful coexistence (Gibbs, 2014; Kashif, 2018). Diversity and tolerance are key factors that contribute towards building an organized, peaceful and ideal society. It helps in creating opportunities, solving problems, strengthening social values and extending cooperation among societies and communities. The social network and social capital created as a result of peaceful coexistence and tolerance is long lasting and beneficial for resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner.

This research study was conducted after the conclusion of the program, and the purpose was to assess the participants’ understanding of the concept of peaceful coexistence, tolerance, empathy and harmony. The expected outcome was that the fellows, as peace agents after going back to their communities would make efforts for bringing change in the society. The research studies show that the young people demonstrating positive behaviour like civil engagement can play their part in peacebuilding (McKeown & Taylor, 2017). Therefore this study is in line with the literature available on the concept of peace building, peaceful coexistence and conflict management.

Peaceful coexistence and tolerance is necessary for the world in 21st century. It is because of the fact that the world has become a global village. It has brought people from varying cultures and beliefs together and affected the lifestyle (Tandos, 2017). According to a research study, about 600 million young, aged people live in war-ridden and conflict. For peacebuilding and coexistence, their voice needs to be heard (Ozcelik, Nesterova, Young & Maxwell, 2021). In old times, humans were not friendly to each other, and enmity existed among them but the modern human has learnt to form societies where people with different thoughts and lifestyles could live together. People with diverse political ideas, communities, ethical and sexual orientation ethnicity, race, class, gender, and cultural systems agreed to have peaceful coexistence (Alexander, 2019). Long ago, it was understood that for the survival of human life on Earth, peaceful coexistence is important and necessary (Agnihotri, 2017). Thus, the modern human has learnt, based on their experience and orientations that peaceful coexistence is the only way towards prosperity and safeguarding the future of coming generations. Human societies are very complex, diverse and practical wisdom is one of the integral elements of harmony (Huda et al., 2020).

The role of youth in peace initiatives and peacebuilding is becoming more inclusive. With the positive energy, good intentions and a sense of greater good for the society, young people are capable of bringing a long lasting change in the world. Youth through networking,

both formal and informal are participating in peaceful coexistence (Berents, Helen & Caitlin, 2020). Irrespective of religious affiliations, geography, communities and goals in life, young people can have an impact on changing the world, in a positive manner and eliminating terrorism, religious extremism and mutual conflicts.

Background

Violence has been a part of human life and experience and various efforts are made to counter it and the underlying causes (Acheing'opere, 2020). There are many strategies that could help in countering the violence and extremism. Education is one of them. It plays a central role in peace and peacebuilding. It is like a catalyst that strengthens the process of forming a society based on mutual respect, acceptance, diversity and tolerance. In the recent past, the world has witnessed two great wars in the form of World War 1 and 2, where millions of people lost their lives, but these wars could not bring peace to the world. At the end it was the compromise, and political solution that restored the peace of the world. There are many examples where dialogue and peace talks have ended decade long wars. Thus, peace is the way forward and is only possible with education and dialogue. (Agnihotri, 2017).

Education is the solution for peace building and for this, the educational curriculum needs lessons on peaceful coexistence (Tandos, 2017). The curriculum at school level should have lessons on tolerance, diversity and peace. Also, interpersonal skills like critical thinking and self-reflection play an important role in analyzing social practices, making them tolerant and peaceful for mutual coexistence (Gibbs, 2014).

The root causes that lead to extremism, lawlessness, unrest and conflict are drug addiction, corruption, injustice, and vandalism etc. They have failed the practice of human values in society. They have become a challenge for society and government. To counter this, out of many available alternatives, the most effective and long term alternative is peaceful co-existence. It has become an emerging and popular concept among educational institutions. It is because educators have a practical way of promoting peaceful coexistence and implementing it in society (Navarro, 2019). From Kindergarten and up to university level children have many opportunities to learn about peace, tolerance and diversity and to exhibit it in their behaviour, integrate it to their behaviours and implement it in their community and society. Teachers and facilitators have to play their part, with effective lessons on diversity, tolerance and peace.

Methodology

For this research study, a survey method was used, where a close ended questionnaire was emailed to all the participants of the fellowship program. A reminder about the questionnaire was also sent to the participants through Whatsapp group. The study was conducted at the end of the fellowship program, arranged by the Department of Philosophy, University of Peshawar, to understand about the concept of peace and peace building by the participants. Because of the time constraints, a close-ended questionnaire was prepared and emailed to the participants. Of all the participants, 45 percent filled and sent the forms back. The questionnaire contained a total of 16 questions. The first question, about the name of the participants, was optional. The next 4 questions were about the age, gender, district or agency and educational background respectively. The remaining 11 questions were related to the concept of peaceful co-existence, where different scenarios were given. These questions were based on the lacquered 5 points

scale, ranging from strongly disagree to agree, neutral, agree and disagree. The results were analyzed with the help of built-in features of google forms.

Findings

Demographics

The fellowship program had a representation of both male and female participants. The findings show that 39.1 percent of the respondents were female, and 60.9 were male. The average age was 23 years.

Figure 1. Demographic Distribution of the respondents

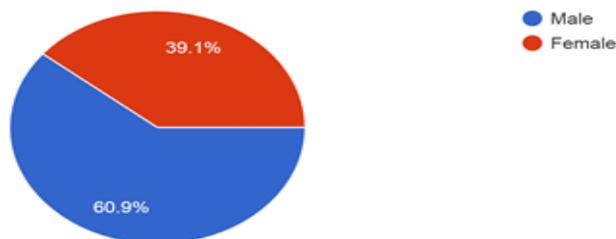
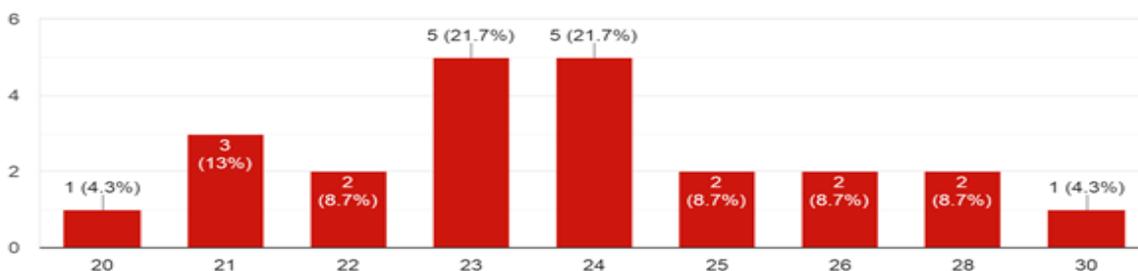


Figure 2. Age of the Respondents

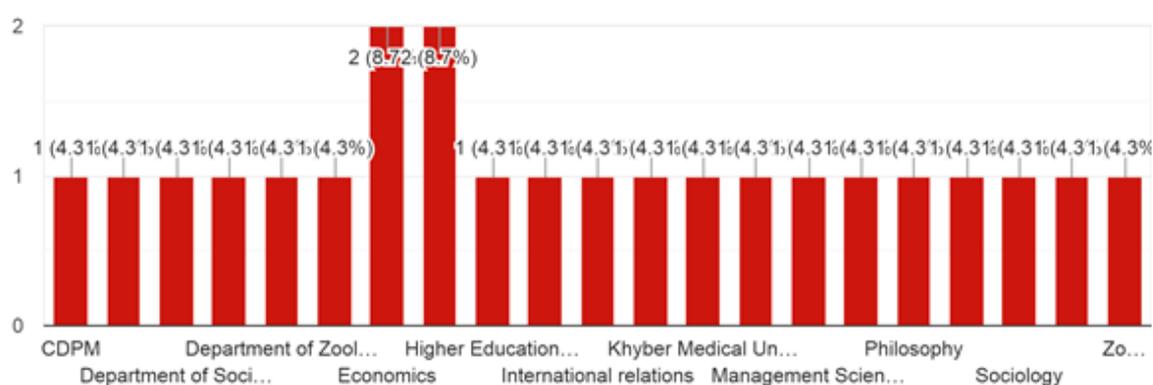


To have an equal representation of all the districts efforts were made to have representation of all the districts from the province. For this study the respondents from the fellowship program belonged to 16 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The respondents were working, studying or had an affiliation with different education sectors.

Figure 3. Place of belonging of respondents



Figure 4. Affiliation with Educational Department or Institute



Responses

As the purpose of this research study was to record the understanding about peace building by the participants a sthe participants had to go back in their communities and work for the peace in the society, therefore the participants of the fellowship program were asked questions about peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence. When asked that whether they should have only interactions with those who are like them in their thoughts, believes, and backgrounds, 34.8 % disagreed, 17.4 % remained neutral, 34.8% agreed and 13 strongly disagreed with this question.

The question that those, who are physically strong are naturally privileged and have the right to more resources, 39.1 % strongly disagreed, and 26.1 % disagreed, 17.4 remained neutral. 17.4 agreed to the notion.

56.5 % strongly agreed and 39.1 agreed that violence and discrimination must be avoided as it gives rise to more violence and rebellion thoughts.

52.2 % strongly agreed and 34.8 % agreed that learning about new cultures and diversified communities broadens our worldviews and develop a sense of tolerance.

The participants disagreed that those having different viewpoints, belief systems, thoughts or cultures should be forced to adhere to our viewpoints. 65.2 % strongly disagreed and 26.1 % disagreed. Similarly, the participants were asked whether they should interfere in other's affairs and force them to believe in the way they think is right, 43.5 % strongly disagreed and 39.1 disagreed.

The participants agreed that women have as much right to education, job opportunities and health facilities as men do. 47.8 % strongly agreed and 13 % agreed to this notion.

52.2 % strongly agreed and 34.8 % agreed that dialogue among youth from diversified cultures helps in peacebuilding.

All the respondents agreed that irrespective of what they think is right, they should respect others and treat them well. 52.2 % strongly agreed and 47.8 % agreed to the question.

73.9 % of respondents strongly agreed and 30.4 % agreed that what they learnt at the fellowship program will help them and their community to live in harmony.

Analysis

The result from this survey shows that the youth and students are determined for this cause and will play their role in peacebuilding. It also shows that they believe in harmony, tolerance and acceptance of equal rights to humans, irrespective of beliefs, race and ethnicity. Such beliefs are helpful in peaceful co-existence. These results also correlate to other research studies on the topic of peace and conflict management. For example in the year 2016, a study was conducted among the students of 5 Latin American countries, in which students at secondary schools were asked questions of peaceful coexistence. The students agreed that love is the key to peaceful coexistence. This exhibits that the concept of peace is universal and Humans, by nature are peaceful and peace loving. Accepting other's rights, and respecting their beliefs leads to peaceful environment in the society. Thus the students also agreed that empathy helps in peacebuilding (Schulz, Ainley, Cox & Friedman 2018). The interest, efforts and energy youth are putting in peacebuilding is getting recognition (Danesh, 2008). Another view about peace is that more and more awareness should be created about the concept. Especially the youth, as the future of the world have to know that the only way to a peaceful world is accepting the diversity and tolerance and other's emotions, beliefs and existence must be respected. Participation in peace conferences and fellowships can overcome radicalization. Youth participation is very important in peace initiatives, but often their voice is underestimated and not included in peace processes. (Ozcelik, Nesterova, Young & Maxwell, 2020). More opportunities and research studies can raise awareness among youth in the creation of peaceful societies.

Conclusion

Research studies shows that about 1.8 billion population in the world are aged from 10 to 24 years. It means that young people are the future of the world. Out of these young people, one-third live in war ridden areas like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Syria (Amambia et al., 2018). Beside all the hurdles, poverty and lack of opportunities, young people and students are determined to bring peace to society. It was very significant in this study that the participants in the peaceful co-existence fellowship program were from different regions and diverse educational backgrounds, yet they shared similar views in building a peaceful, radiant and tolerant society. Also the results shows that awareness and education are the building blocks of an ideal, peaceful world. Without going to the extremes, and engaging to armed

conflict, there is always a middle ground for solving an issue. Almost any issue could be solved by integrated and principled negotiations approach, where people compromise and everyone gets a share of the results of a problem (Fisher, Patton & Ury, 2020).

Thus it is concluded that education, awareness, communication and dialogue among people of diverse cultures, beliefs and faiths can have a vital role in building a secure and safe world for the coming generations. The destruction and the outcomes from the wars and all the armed conflicts only have loss of lives and eventually all the parties involved have to come to the table. Peace talks and negotiations are the way forward to peace and they bring an end to the wars.

Limitations

This study was based on the views about peacebuilding by the participants of the peaceful coexistence program, at the Department of Philosophy, University of Peshawar. Although the participants have a representation of the whole province, yet we cannot say that they represented the whole society. Also most of the participants were aged from 20 to 30 years, which represents a particular age bracket. As with age, emotions, understandings and people's views changes, therefore this study did not represent all the age groups, which is a major limitation of this study. Due to the time constraints, a survey was conducted with close-ended questions. In future a more detailed and comprehensive study can have promising results on the topic of peaceful coexistence. Also, another limitation of this study is that some of the participants did not respond of the questionnaire, despite of multiple reminders. About half of the participants responded to the questionnaire that was emailed to them.

Recommendations

There are few recommendations that will further elaborate the topic and can give promising results. The outcomes of this research study were obtained from a survey from a limited number of respondents. In future a more extensive qualitative research, participatory action research or data may be collected on a large scale to give more insights into the peacebuilding initiatives.

The respondents were undergraduate and postgraduate students. The data may be collected from secondary and higher secondary students to generalize the results. Also, people with less or no education should be provided fellowships and opportunities to participate in peacebuilding initiatives. For getting a holistic and complete view of the peace building, the representation of the factors of society and all the age groups is important.

Education is an ideal way for having a peaceful and ideal society. For this purpose teachers have a vital role in framing the concept of peacebuilding for their students. The curriculum must have lessons on peacebuilding, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and harmony. The concept of peace should be taught to children from an early age as the things taught in early age are more effective.

Another important recommendation is that international donars have to play their role. With the support of donors from peacebuilding organizations, more seminars, conferences, and fellowship programs may be arranged especially for students and youth for war-ridden areas.

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