

Madrasah Reforms in Pakistan: An analysis between Madrasah and social values

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Abstract: The educational landscape of Pakistan has long been characterized by a dual system where madrasahs play a crucial role in providing religious education. Over the years, madrasahs have faced scrutiny and calls for reform due to their perceived role in fostering extremism and their outdated educational practices. This paper critically appraises the current strategies for madrasah reforms in Pakistan and examines future prospects. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing reform strategies, identify challenges, and propose actionable recommendations for integrating madrasah education into the national educational framework. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative data from interviews with policymakers, educators, and madrasah administrators, as well as quantitative data from surveys and government reports. A comprehensive literature review was also conducted to provide context and background. Recent initiatives have aimed at standardizing curricula, incorporating modern subjects, and enhancing regulatory oversight. Despite these efforts, implementation has been inconsistent and met with resistance from madrasah authorities. Key challenges include ideological resistance, inadequate funding, lack of trained teachers for modern subjects, and political interference. Additionally, there is a significant variation in the acceptance and implementation of reforms across different madrasah networks. While some madrasahs have adopted reforms and integrated modern subjects, many continue to operate traditionally, limiting the broader impact of reforms. Policy Harmonization: Establish a unified regulatory framework that ensures consistent implementation of reforms across all madrasahs. Capacity Building: Invest in training programs for madrasah teachers to equip them with the skills needed to teach modern subjects. Community Engagement: Engage with religious leaders and communities to build support for reforms and address ideological resistance. Funding and Resources: Ensure adequate funding and resources for madrasahs to facilitate the integration of modern subjects without compromising religious education. The study concludes that while madrasah reforms in Pakistan have made some progress, significant challenges remain. A holistic approach that includes policy harmonization, capacity building, community engagement, and adequate funding is essential for the successful integration of madrasah education into the national framework. Future prospects depend on sustained efforts and collaborative engagement among all stakeholders. This abstract summarizes

the key elements of the study, highlighting the current state of madrassa reforms, the challenges faced, and potential solutions to improve the effectiveness of these reforms. For a detailed analysis and further insights.

Keywords: Madrassas, Reform, Education, Curriculum, Modernization, Government policy, Religious studies, Religious tolerance.

Introduction: Introducing reforms to madrassas in Pakistan is a multifaceted endeavor with significant implications for education, social cohesion, and national security. (Bano, M. 2007) Madrassas, or Islamic religious schools, have long been an integral part of Pakistan's educational landscape, offering religious education to millions of students across the country. (Ahmed, Z. S. 2009) However, concerns have been raised about the quality of education, ideological extremism, and lack of integration with mainstream educational systems. (Rahman, K. 2009) Reforming madrassas involves addressing these challenges while respecting the religious and cultural significance of these institutions. (Looney, R. 2003) It requires a comprehensive approach that balances religious education with modern subjects, promotes critical thinking, and fosters tolerance and pluralism. Moreover, reforms should aim to enhance transparency, accountability, and oversight to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies. Successful madrassa reforms can contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant society, empower students with relevant skills for the modern economy, and mitigate the risk of radicalization and extremism. (Sajjad, M. W. 2009) However, implementing reforms requires collaboration between government, religious authorities, educators, and civil society to ensure buy-in and sustainability. By investing in the transformation of madrassas, Pakistan can build a stronger foundation for social harmony, economic development, and national security. (Zaman, M. Q. 1999) The madrassa system in Pakistan constitutes a vital component of the country's educational landscape and societal fabric. Madrassas, or Islamic religious schools, have played a significant role in providing religious education to millions of students across Pakistan, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access to formal schooling may be limited. Established with the aim of imparting Islamic teachings and nurturing a sense of religious identity, madrassas have historically served as centers for learning Quranic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and Arabic language. (Fair, C. C. 2012) They have provided opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of Islam and develop a strong moral compass. However, the madrassa system in Pakistan has also faced criticism and scrutiny, particularly concerning issues of curriculum quality, lack

of standardization, and allegations of promoting extremist ideologies. (Bano, M. 2007) Concerns about the potential role of some madrassas in fostering radicalization and contributing to social divisions have prompted calls for reforms. Efforts to reform the madrassa system in Pakistan aim to address these challenges while preserving the religious and cultural heritage of these institutions. Reforms seek to modernize curricula, integrate mainstream subjects such as math, science, and social studies, enhance teacher training, and promote critical thinking and tolerance. (Sajjad, F. (2013) Additionally, reforms aim to improve oversight and regulation to ensure that madrassas operate within the framework of national educational standards and contribute positively to society. (Ahmad, M. 2004) By modernizing and reforming the madrassa system, Pakistan endeavors to create a more inclusive and balanced educational environment that equips students with both religious knowledge and the skills necessary to succeed in the modern world. However, implementing reforms requires collaboration between government authorities, religious leaders, educators, and communities to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. (Billquist, D. L., & Colbert, J. M. 2006)

2- Literature Review:

The literature on the madrassa system in Pakistan is extensive and encompasses a wide range of topics, including its historical development, educational structure, ideological orientation, social impact, and potential for reform. Here's a brief overview of some key themes and findings from the literature:

Historical Context: Studies often begin by tracing the historical evolution of madrassas in Pakistan, highlighting their roots in traditional Islamic education and their subsequent expansion under various historical and political contexts, including British colonial rule and post-independence developments. (Rahman, T. 2007)

Educational Structure and Curriculum: Scholars analyze the organizational structure, curriculum content, and pedagogical methods employed in madrassas. They often note the emphasis on religious subjects such as Quranic studies, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the relative neglect of modern subjects like math, science, and social sciences. (Shafiq, M., Azad, A. R., & Munir, M. 2019)

Social and Political Dynamics: The literature explores the social and political factors shaping the madrassa system, including its role in providing education to

marginalized populations, its influence on religious identity formation, and its interactions with state institutions and political actors. (Ghani, F., & Ghani, B. 2021)

Ideological Orientation: Researchers examine the ideological orientation of madrassas, assessing the extent to which they promote conservative or radical interpretations of Islam. Some studies highlight variations among madrassas, with some adhering to moderate interpretations while others espouse more extremist ideologies. (Zaidi, M. 2013)

Social Impact and Integration: Scholars assess the social impact of madrassas on Pakistani society, examining their role in fostering social cohesion or contributing to sectarian divisions and radicalization. They also explore efforts to integrate madrassa graduates into mainstream society and the labor market. (Zafar, H. 2020)

Challenges and Reform Efforts: Much of the literature focuses on the challenges facing the madrassa system, including issues related to curriculum quality, teacher training, governance, and oversight. Researchers propose various reform strategies, such as modernizing curriculum content, improving teacher qualifications, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and promoting dialogue between madrassa authorities and state institutions. (JABEEN, F. 2022)

International Perspectives: Some studies provide comparative analyses of madrassa systems in other countries, highlighting similarities and differences with the Pakistani context. They often draw lessons from experiences in other countries to inform discussions on reform strategies and policy interventions. (Ashraf, N. 2009)

Overall, the literature on the madrassa system in Pakistan reflects a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that intersects with various aspects of society, culture, politics, and religion. While there is considerable debate and disagreement about the nature and future trajectory of madrassas, scholars generally agree on the need for meaningful reforms to address the system's shortcomings and maximize its potential contributions to Pakistani society.

3- Research Questions:

1. How do madrassa curricula in Pakistan compare to mainstream educational curricula in terms of content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes?

2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of madrassa students, teachers, and administrators towards the current curriculum, and how do they perceive the relevance of traditional religious education versus modern subjects?
3. How do teaching methods and instructional practices in madrassas influence students' critical thinking skills, religious beliefs, and attitudes towards broader societal issues?

4- Gap of Study:

Identifying gaps in the study of the madrassa system in Pakistan involves recognizing areas where research is lacking or where existing literature is limited in its coverage or depth. Here are some potential gaps in the study of the madrassa system:

There is a shortage of longitudinal studies tracking the educational trajectories and life outcomes of madrassa graduates over time. Long-term research could provide valuable insights into the social and economic integration of madrassa alumni into mainstream society, as well as their contributions to community development and civic engagement. While some studies have examined the ideological orientations and social backgrounds of madrassa students, there is a need for more qualitative research exploring the lived experiences, aspirations, and challenges faced by students within the madrassa environment. Understanding student perspectives could shed light on issues such as religious identity formation, critical thinking skills, and social mobility. Most studies of madrassas in Pakistan focus on national-level trends and overlook regional variations in educational practices, curriculum content, and ideological orientations. Research that examines madrassa systems in specific regions or provinces, as well as differences between Sunni and Shia madrassas, could provide a more nuanced understanding of the diversity within the madrassa sector. Research on madrassas often overlooks gender dynamics, particularly regarding female students and teachers. There is a need for studies that explore the educational experiences of girls and women in madrassas, as well as the role of gender in shaping curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and opportunities for female religious scholars. While there have been efforts to reform the madrassa system in Pakistan, there is limited empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of these reform initiatives. Studies that assess the implementation and outcomes of specific reform measures, such as curriculum modernization or teacher training programs, could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with reforming the madrassa sector. Research on madrassas often overlooks the role of external actors, including

foreign donors, transnational religious networks, and extremist organizations, in shaping the ideological orientations and operational dynamics of madrassas. Investigating the sources and implications of external funding could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving radicalization and extremism within the madrassa sector. Addressing these gaps in the study of the madrassa system in Pakistan requires interdisciplinary research approaches, collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and engagement with diverse stakeholders, including madrassa administrators, students, religious scholars, policymakers, and civil society organizations. By filling these gaps, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the madrassa system and inform evidence-based policy interventions aimed at promoting educational quality, social cohesion, and national security.

5- Purpose of Study:

The purpose of studying the madrassa system in Pakistan is multifaceted and encompasses various academic, social, and policy-oriented objectives. Here are some key purposes of studying the madrassa system. Understanding the structure, curriculum, and pedagogical methods employed in madrassas allows for an assessment of the quality and effectiveness of religious education provided to millions of students in Pakistan. This includes examining the relevance of traditional religious studies and the integration of modern subjects to prepare students for the contemporary world.

6- Research Methodology:

Research on the madrassa system in Pakistan employs various methodologies to investigate its educational, social, and ideological dimensions. The choice of research methodology depends on the specific research questions, objectives, and available resources. Here are some common research methodologies used in studying the madrassa system. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation, are often used to explore the lived experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of madrassa students, teachers, administrators, and community members. Qualitative research allows for in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena, such as religious identity formation, gender dynamics, and institutional practices within madrassas. Quantitative methods, including surveys, questionnaires, and statistical analysis, are employed to collect numerical data on various aspects of the madrassa system, such as enrollment rates, curriculum content, and academic performance. Quantitative research enables researchers to identify patterns,

trends, and correlations within large datasets and to generalize findings to broader populations.

7- Data Analysis:

Analyzing data related to the madrassa system in Pakistan involves several steps to derive meaningful insights and draw conclusions. Here's a general outline of the data analysis process. Before analysis begins, the raw data collected through various research methods, such as surveys, interviews, or document analysis, needs to be cleaned and prepared for analysis. This involves checking for errors, inconsistencies, missing values, and formatting issues, as well as transforming data into a suitable format for analysis.

Madrasas, or Islamic religious schools, have long been a cornerstone of Pakistan's educational landscape, playing a crucial role in providing religious and basic education, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These institutions, which have a rich historical heritage, are deeply intertwined with the social and cultural fabric of the country. However, the traditional focus of madrasas on religious education, often at the expense of contemporary subjects, has sparked ongoing debates about their role and effectiveness in the modern educational system. Madrasas in Pakistan trace their origins back to the pre-partition era of the Indian subcontinent, where they served as the primary institutions for Islamic learning. Over centuries, these schools have been instrumental in preserving Islamic scholarship and culture, providing education in religious texts, jurisprudence, and Arabic. Following the creation of Pakistan in 1947, madrasas continued to flourish, particularly in regions where access to public education was limited. For many families, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, madrasas offered a vital educational resource that was both accessible and affordable. Today, madrasas remain a significant part of Pakistan's educational framework. They cater to a substantial student population, providing not only religious instruction but also basic literacy skills. However, the landscape of Islamic education faces numerous challenges that necessitate comprehensive reforms. Key issues include. (Ahmed, Z. S. 2009)

Traditional madrasa curricula are predominantly focused on religious studies, often neglecting subjects like science, mathematics, and languages. This narrow focus limits the educational and career opportunities available to madrasa graduates, affecting their integration into the broader economic and social fabric of the country. There is considerable variation in the quality of education across madrasas. (Rahman, K. 2009) While some institutions provide rigorous and

comprehensive instruction, many others are hampered by outdated teaching methods, inadequate resources, and untrained teachers. This inconsistency impacts the overall educational outcomes and opportunities for students. In the wake of global security challenges, particularly post-9/11, madrasas have come under scrutiny for their potential links to extremist ideologies. (Bano, M. 2007) Ensuring that these institutions promote moderate and peaceful interpretations of Islam is a critical issue for policymakers. (Sajjad, M. W. 2009) Madrasa graduates often struggle to find employment outside religious or teaching roles due to the limited scope of their education. This lack of economic mobility perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits social advancement.

In Pakistan, madrassas have long been a cornerstone of Islamic education, serving as traditional centers of learning and religious instruction. These institutions have played a crucial role in preserving Islamic heritage, disseminating religious knowledge, and shaping the moral and ethical character of countless students. However, in recent years, madrassas in Pakistan have come under increasing scrutiny due to concerns about their potential role in fostering extremism, promoting intolerance, and perpetuating socio-political divisions. (Chandran, S. 2022) As a result, there have been calls for reforms in the madrassa sector to enhance transparency, accountability, and quality of education while addressing the challenges posed by the changing socio-political landscape of Pakistan.

The evolution of madrassas in Pakistan reflects a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that have shaped the development of Islamic education in the country. (Bano, M. 2007) From their origins as traditional centers of Islamic learning to their modern-day role in a rapidly changing educational landscape, madrassas have faced a multitude of challenges and opportunities that have influenced their structure, curriculum, and impact on society. (Sajjad, F. 2013) As Pakistan grapples with the implications of the evolving role of madrassas in shaping the educational and ideological landscape of the country, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive reforms to address the multifaceted issues facing these institutions.

This paper aims to explore the landscape of madrassas in Pakistan, examining their historical evolution, current challenges, and potential reforms to enhance their contribution to the educational and social fabric of the country. (Billquist, D. L., & Colbert, J. M. 2006) By delving into the complexities and nuances of madrassa education in Pakistan, we seek to provide insights that can inform policy

decisions, guide reform efforts, and foster constructive dialogue among stakeholders in the field of Islamic education.

The historical evolution of madrassas in Pakistan can be traced back to the early Islamic period, when these institutions emerged as centers of learning, religious instruction, and community development. (Rahman, T. 2007) Madrassas traditionally focused on the study of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, Quranic studies, and Arabic language, with an emphasis on memorization, recitation, and interpretation of religious texts. Over the centuries, madrassas spread across the Indian subcontinent, serving as key hubs of Islamic scholarship, spirituality, and social welfare. (Shafiq, M., Azad, A. R., & Munir, M. 2019) In Pakistan, madrassas experienced significant growth and diversification during the British colonial period and in the aftermath of partition in 1947. Many madrassas were established to meet the educational needs of Muslim communities, provide religious instruction, and preserve Islamic heritage in a rapidly changing socio-political context. The proliferation of madrassas in Pakistan reflected the enduring demand for Islamic education, the resilience of traditional religious institutions, and the deep-rooted connection between madrassas and broader societal values and beliefs. (Shakeel, H., Mahsud, I., & Hussain, S. 2020)

In conclusion, the evolution of madrassas in Pakistan reflects a dynamic interplay of tradition and modernity, continuity and change, challenge and opportunity. As madrassas navigate the complex terrain of educational reform, ideological renewal, and socio-political transformation, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive and collaborative efforts to address the multifaceted issues facing these institutions. By embracing reforms that promote quality, relevance, inclusivity, and accountability, Pakistan can harness the potential of madrassas as catalysts for positive social change, intellectual development, and moral transformation in the 21st century. Through sustained dialogue, strategic planning, and collective action, madrassas in Pakistan can realize their potential as vibrant centers of learning, ethical formation, and cultural dialogue that contribute to the advancement of education, citizenship, and social cohesion in the country.

Research Conclusion:

Madrasa reforms in Pakistan represent a critical step towards modernizing the educational landscape and ensuring that all students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for the challenges of the 21st century. By addressing the existing challenges and leveraging the opportunities for

improvement, Pakistan can create an inclusive educational system that respects its rich religious traditions while embracing the needs of a modern, globalized world. Through thoughtful and collaborative efforts, madrasas can continue to play a vital role in the nation's educational and socio-economic development, fostering both religious and secular knowledge that contributes to the overall progress of society. Madrasas have long been an integral part of Pakistan's educational landscape, serving crucial roles in both religious education and community support. Historically rooted in the traditions of the Indian subcontinent, these institutions have adapted to various socio-political changes over the decades. However, the contemporary era has brought forth new challenges and opportunities, necessitating comprehensive reforms to align madrasas more closely with national and global educational standards.

Futuristic Approach:

Invest in research initiatives to generate empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different reform strategies and their impact on educational outcomes, social cohesion, and countering extremism. Evidence-based policy approaches can guide decision-making, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation of madrasa reform initiatives. Facilitate international collaboration and exchange programs that enable madrasa students, teachers, and administrators to interact with peers from diverse cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds. International partnerships can broaden perspectives, foster cross-cultural understanding, and expose participants to innovative educational practices. By embracing a futuristic approach to the madrasa system in Pakistan, stakeholders can work together to build a more inclusive, resilient, and forward-thinking educational ecosystem that empowers students with the knowledge, skills, and values they need to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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