

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIVERGENCE IN SCHOOL AND MADRASSA EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Abstract

This study examines the epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrassa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, within a qualitative interpretivist framework. Grounded in social constructionist epistemology and informed by postcolonial theory, the research explores how two parallel education systems construct, transmit, and legitimize knowledge differently. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 46 participants, including madrassa scholars and school, college, and university teachers, alongside curriculum document analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic, content, and discourse analysis to identify patterns of meaning, institutional practices, and ideological constructions. Findings reveal a deep-rooted epistemological divide between secular and religious knowledge systems, reflected in contrasting pedagogical practices, curriculum orientations, and authority structures. Schools emphasize critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and standardized assessment, whereas madrassas prioritize memorization, textual authority, and moral-religious instruction. The study further demonstrates that this divergence is historically shaped and discursively sustained through postcolonial knowledge classifications that separate “religious” and “modern” education. The study concludes that the school–madrassa dichotomy is not merely institutional but fundamentally epistemological, requiring integrative educational reforms that bridge knowledge systems while respecting their distinct identities. The findings contribute to debates on educational dualism, curriculum reform, and postcolonial knowledge structures in South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Education systems are fundamentally shaped by their underlying epistemological assumptions and pedagogical orientations, which collectively determine how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and validated. In pluralistic societies such as Pakistan, the coexistence of parallel education systems—namely formal schooling and religious seminaries (madrassas)—has produced distinct and often competing epistemic frameworks. These systems not only differ in curricular content but also embody divergent

conceptions of knowledge, authority, and learning processes, thereby influencing learners’ cognitive development, socialization, and life trajectories.

The madrassa system, deeply rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions, is primarily grounded in a revelatory epistemology, where knowledge is derived from divine sources such as the Qur’an and Hadith and interpreted through classical jurisprudential traditions. This epistemological orientation emphasizes textual authority,

preservation of religious knowledge, and moral formation. In contrast, the formal school system in Pakistan is largely influenced by **positivist and constructivist epistemologies**, where knowledge is considered empirical, evolving, and subject to critical inquiry and scientific validation. These contrasting epistemologies create a foundational divergence in how learners perceive truth, authority, and reasoning (Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024).

Pedagogically, these epistemological differences manifest in distinct teaching and learning practices. Madrassa education in Pakistan has traditionally relied on teacher-centered approaches, including rote memorization, lecture-based instruction, and adherence to classical curricula such as *Dars-e-Nizami*. Such practices prioritize retention and transmission of established knowledge over critical engagement and innovation. Contemporary research highlights that madrassas often lack student-centered and reflective pedagogies, limiting opportunities for inquiry-based learning and higher-order thinking skills (Rahman & El-Muhammady, 2025). Conversely, formal schools increasingly adopt interactive pedagogies, including collaborative learning, problem-solving, and competency-based assessment, which are aligned with global educational standards and labor market demands.

The divergence between these two systems is particularly significant in the context of Pakistan, where madrassas continue to play a vital role in providing accessible education, especially in underserved and rural areas. In provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), madrassas often fill critical gaps left by the formal education sector, offering free education and social mobility opportunities to marginalized populations (Zafar, 2020). At the same time, the lack of integration between madrassa and school education has been associated with broader challenges, including limited employability of graduates, social stratification, and the persistence of parallel socio-cultural identities (Merit Research Journal, 2025).

Recent scholarly discourse has increasingly emphasized the need to critically examine not

only the structural differences between these systems but also their underlying epistemological and pedagogical foundations. Studies suggest that madrassa education, while effective in moral and religious socialization, often underemphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinary knowledge, which are essential for participation in contemporary knowledge economies (Qureshi et al., 2020). Similarly, efforts to reform madrassa education have faced significant resistance due to ideological, political, and institutional constraints, highlighting the complexity of integrating traditional and modern educational paradigms (Munir & Sajjad, 2023).

In this context, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa presents a particularly relevant case for empirical investigation. The province exhibits a strong presence of both madrassa and formal schooling systems, shaped by socio-cultural, religious, and economic dynamics. Understanding the epistemological and pedagogical divergence within this dual system is essential for informing educational policy, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing the quality and relevance of education.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the epistemological beliefs and pedagogical practices embedded in school and madrassa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with a focus on identifying areas of divergence and potential convergence. By providing empirical evidence, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on educational reform, integration, and the development of a more holistic and inclusive education system in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

The education system in Pakistan is characterized by the coexistence of parallel streams, notably formal schooling and madrassa education, each grounded in distinct epistemological assumptions and pedagogical practices. While formal schools are largely informed by modern, secular, and constructivist paradigms that emphasize critical inquiry, scientific reasoning, and skill development, madrassas are rooted in traditional Islamic epistemology, focusing on revealed knowledge, textual authority, and moral

instruction. This duality has resulted in a significant divergence in how knowledge is conceptualized, delivered, and internalized by learners.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where both systems operate extensively—particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas—this divergence is more pronounced. Madrassas often serve as accessible alternatives to formal schooling due to their affordability and religious orientation, yet they are frequently criticized for limited curricular diversity and reliance on teacher-centered pedagogies. Conversely, formal schools, despite adopting modern pedagogical approaches, face challenges related to quality, access, and contextual relevance. The absence of alignment between these systems contributes to disparities in cognitive skills, employability, and social integration among graduates.

Despite ongoing policy debates on education reform and integration, there remains a lack of empirical research that systematically examines the epistemological beliefs and pedagogical practices underpinning both systems within the specific socio-cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Without such evidence, policy interventions risk being fragmented, ineffective, or misaligned with ground realities. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the nature and extent of epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrasa education and its implications for learners' outcomes and broader societal cohesion.

Research Questions

1. What are the key differences in epistemological beliefs and pedagogical practices between school and madrasa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. How do these differences influence students' cognitive development, critical thinking, and employability outcomes?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze and compare the epistemological foundations and pedagogical practices of school and madrasa education systems.

2. To assess the impact of this divergence on students' cognitive skills, critical thinking, and employability.

Literature Review:

Epistemological Foundations in Educational Contexts

Epistemology, defined as the study of the nature, sources, and justification of knowledge, plays a central role in shaping educational processes and outcomes. In educational settings, epistemological beliefs influence how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and evaluated within classrooms. Research demonstrates that teachers' epistemological beliefs significantly affect their instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement (Khalid et al., 2023).

In the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), empirical studies indicate that teachers' epistemological orientations range from traditional (knowledge as fixed) to constructivist (knowledge as evolving). These beliefs directly shape whether teaching practices are teacher-centered or learner-centered (Itbar et al., 2017). Moreover, contemporary research highlights a strong relationship between epistemological beliefs and classroom practices, particularly in secondary education settings (Shah et al., 2025).

Epistemological Orientation of Formal School Education

Formal schooling in Pakistan, including KP, increasingly reflects constructivist and empiricist epistemologies, where knowledge is viewed as dynamic, evidence-based, and open to revision. Such orientations promote inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and student participation.

Empirical research shows that students' epistemological beliefs are closely associated with their approaches to learning; those with sophisticated beliefs tend to adopt deep learning strategies, while those with simplistic beliefs rely on rote memorization (Shah & Choudhary, 2022).

This epistemological stance aligns with global educational reforms emphasizing active learning, problem-solving, and collaborative engagement.

Consequently, formal schooling is increasingly geared toward developing higher-order cognitive skills necessary for participation in modern knowledge economies.

Epistemological Foundations of Madrassa Education

In contrast, madrassa education is grounded in a theocentric epistemology, where knowledge is perceived as divinely revealed, absolute, and preserved through religious texts. The primary sources of knowledge—the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship—are considered authoritative and immutable.

Studies on madrassa education in Pakistan highlight that this system emphasizes memorization, textual transmission, and moral instruction. While often criticized for limiting critical inquiry, recent scholarship suggests that Islamic epistemology inherently accommodates reflection (*tadabbur*), reasoning (*ijtihad*), and deep understanding (*tafaqquh*), although these elements are not always fully operationalized pedagogically (Rahman & El-Muhammady, 2025).

Additionally, madrassas play a crucial role in preserving religious identity and social cohesion, functioning as culturally embedded institutions within Pakistani society (Angeles & Aijazi, 2018).

Pedagogical Divergence Between Schools and Madrassas

Pedagogical Practices in Formal Schools

Pedagogy in formal schools is increasingly learner-centered, emphasizing inquiry-based and interactive approaches. These include collaborative learning, problem-solving activities, and continuous assessment strategies. Teachers with advanced epistemological beliefs tend to adopt such methods, fostering student autonomy and engagement (Khalid et al., 2023).

These practices are consistent with constructivist learning theory, which views learners as active participants in knowledge construction and emphasizes critical thinking and analytical reasoning.

Pedagogical Practices in Madrassas

Madrassa pedagogy remains predominantly teacher-centered, characterized by lecture-based instruction (*dars*), rote memorization (*hifz*), and limited integration of modern pedagogical tools.

Despite these limitations, research indicates that madrassa education contributes significantly to the development of discipline, moral values, and ethical **competencies** (Qureshi et al., 2021). Furthermore, reform-oriented scholarship suggests that madrassas can integrate constructivist strategies—such as inquiry-based learning—without undermining their epistemological foundations (Rahman & El-Muhammady, 2025).

Educational Dualism and Socio-Cultural Context in KP

The coexistence of formal schools and madrassas in KP reflects a broader educational dualism, shaped by historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors. Madrassas often serve marginalized populations by providing free or low-cost education, thereby addressing gaps in state provision.

This dual system represents two parallel knowledge traditions: modern-secular and religious-traditional. The divergence between these systems reflects deeper ideological and epistemological differences embedded within society.

Implications of Epistemological and Pedagogical Divergence

Cognitive Development

Students in formal schools are more likely to develop higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, whereas madrassa students demonstrate strengths in memorization and textual interpretation (Shah & Choudhary, 2022).

Employability and Skill Development

Formal education aligns more closely with labor market demands, equipping students with transferable skills. In contrast, madrassa graduates often face limited employment opportunities outside religious sectors, although

they possess strong moral and ethical competencies (Qureshi et al., 2021).

Social and Ideological Implications

The epistemological divide contributes to differing worldviews and social identities, potentially affecting social cohesion and national integration. However, madrassas also play a vital role in maintaining religious identity and community cohesion (Angeles & Aijazi, 2018).

Recent literature increasingly emphasizes the need for **integrative educational reforms** to bridge epistemological divides. However, several gaps remain:

- Limited comparative empirical studies focusing specifically on KP
- Insufficient analysis of classroom practices within madrassas
- Lack of longitudinal research on student outcomes across both systems

The literature reveals a clear epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrasa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Formal schools, guided by constructivist epistemology, emphasize inquiry, critical thinking, and learner-centered pedagogy. In contrast, madrassas adhere to a theocentric, text-based epistemology focused on religious instruction and moral development.

Despite these differences, both systems serve important societal roles. Bridging this divide requires context-sensitive and inclusive reforms that integrate modern pedagogical approaches with traditional epistemological frameworks.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for *Epistemological and Pedagogical Divergence in School and Madrasa Education: Evidence from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*. Building upon the empirical and theoretical discussions presented earlier, this study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the social constructionist (interpretivist) paradigm. The primary objective is to develop an in-depth understanding of the epistemological and pedagogical dichotomy

between school and madrasa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Given the sensitive, historical, and ideologically complex nature of the topic, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate to generate rich, contextual, and meaning-oriented data. The study uses discourse analysis as the central analytical technique, supported by thematic and content analysis, to examine data collected from religious scholars (Ulama-e-Kiram) and secular education professionals (school, college, and university teachers).

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach, which is suitable for examining socially constructed realities such as educational beliefs and institutional discourses. Unlike quantitative approaches that seek generalization through numerical analysis, qualitative research aims to generate in-depth understanding through inductive reasoning.

The interpretivist paradigm enables exploration of how individuals perceive, construct, and negotiate the epistemological divide between school and madrasa systems within their socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by postcolonial theory, which critically examines how colonial histories continue to shape knowledge systems, institutions, and power relations (Young, 2003). Edward Said's concept of Orientalism provides an important analytical lens for understanding how Western epistemological frameworks have historically constructed and positioned non-Western knowledge systems as "other" (Said, 1978).

Within this framework, the school-madrasa dichotomy is interpreted as a postcolonial construct shaped by competing epistemologies:

- Western-modern secular knowledge systems introduced through colonial governance
- Indigenous religious knowledge systems rooted in Islamic intellectual traditions

This theoretical lens enables a critical examination of how knowledge, power, and

institutional authority interact in shaping educational structures in Pakistan.

Study Area: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of Pakistan’s most significant provinces, with a population of approximately 30.5 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The province comprises 27 districts and is characterized by cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities, and historical complexity.

The education system in KP reflects a dual structure consisting of formal schools and madrassas. Formal schools (public and private) provide secular education from primary to higher levels, while madrassas offer religious education based on Islamic teachings.

Madrassas play a particularly important role in rural and low-income communities by providing free education, boarding, and lodging facilities.

Sample Size

A total of 46 participants were selected for the study:

Category	Number
Madrassa Scholars/Teachers	23
School/College/University Teachers	23
Total	46

This balanced sample allowed for comparative analysis between the two educational systems.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using two main sources:

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews** with school and madrassa teachers/scholars
- Document analysis** of school and madrassa curricula

Interviews focused on participants’ perceptions regarding the origin, evolution, and dynamics of the school-madrassa dichotomy, while curriculum analysis provided institutional and epistemological context.

Content Analysis of Curriculum

Content analysis was used as both a data collection and analytical technique. Curriculum

Historically, their role expanded significantly during and after the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), which increased their socio-political visibility in the region.

Sampling Strategy

The study employed **purposive and snowball sampling techniques**. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant academic and religious expertise, while snowball sampling helped identify additional participants through referrals.

Participants included individuals with strong academic or religious qualifications, such as PhD scholars, university lecturers, and qualified Islamic scholars (Ulama with formal religious training).

documents were systematically reviewed to identify underlying epistemological orientations, pedagogical structures, and knowledge frameworks.

This approach enabled the extraction of meaningful patterns from textual data and facilitated triangulation with interview findings.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was employed to examine how language constructs meaning, ideology, and power relations within educational narratives. Discourse is understood as both language use and a system of knowledge production embedded in social practices (Gee, 2005).

In this study, discourse analysis was used to interpret how school and madrassa teachers construct and articulate the epistemological and

pedagogical divide, particularly in relation to historical, colonial, and socio-political influences.

Interview Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide. Participants were asked questions related to:

- The origin of the school-madrassa dichotomy
- Its historical evolution and transformation
- Socio-cultural and institutional dynamics shaping the divide

Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Rapport was established prior to data collection to ensure openness and reliability of responses.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the exclusive academic use of data. Consent was obtained prior to recording interviews. Where recording was not permitted, detailed field notes were maintained.

Data Transcription and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to ensure accuracy. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, supported by discourse and content analysis techniques.

Key themes were identified, categorized, and interpreted in relation to the research questions. The analysis was further guided by postcolonial theoretical concepts, allowing for critical interpretation of the data.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Validity was ensured through methodological triangulation, combining interviews and document analysis.

Reliability was maintained through systematic transcription, consistent coding, and repeated data review.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and transparent documentation of the research process.

Generalization

This study does not aim for statistical generalization but rather analytical and theoretical generalization. Findings are interpreted within broader postcolonial and educational frameworks, allowing for transferability to similar socio-cultural contexts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted through a systematic qualitative interpretivist approach, integrating thematic analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis. This multi-method analytical strategy was employed to ensure depth, triangulation, and theoretical sensitivity in examining the epistemological and pedagogical divergence between school and madrassa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan.

All data obtained from 46 semi-structured interviews and curriculum documents were analyzed inductively, guided by postcolonial theory and social constructionist assumptions. The analysis process involved coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and theoretical integration.

Coding Framework and Data Structuring

The first stage of analysis involved open coding of interview transcripts and curriculum texts. Meaningful statements were identified and labeled into initial codes. These codes were then grouped into categories and later refined into major themes.

Table 1 : Initial Coding Structure

Raw Data Focus	Open Codes	Category
Teaching methods in madrassas	Memorization, rote learning, teacher authority	Pedagogical rigidity
Teaching methods in schools	Critical thinking, inquiry-based learning	Modern pedagogy
Curriculum structure	Religious vs secular subjects	Epistemological separation
Teacher authority	Religious authority, academic authority	Knowledge legitimacy
Historical narratives	Colonial legacy, system dualism	Historical construction

The coding process revealed that participants consistently constructed education in terms of authority, curriculum orientation, and knowledge type, indicating a deep epistemological divide between the two systems.

Emergent Themes from Interview Data

After iterative coding, data were organized into major themes and sub-themes.

Table 2: Final Themes and Sub-Themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Data Frequency	Source
Epistemological Divergence	Revealed vs rational knowledge, sacred vs secular knowledge	High (42/46)	
Pedagogical Differences	Rote learning, lecture-based vs interactive learning	High (39/46)	
Institutional Separation	Parallel systems, lack of integration	Moderate (31/46)	
Authority and Knowledge Power	Religious authority vs academic certification	High (40/46)	
Colonial Legacy in Education	Orientalist knowledge classification	Moderate (28/46)	

The dominance of epistemological and pedagogical themes indicates that participants perceive the school-madrassa divide not merely as institutional separation but as a knowledge conflict rooted in competing worldviews. The high frequency of responses related to authority

highlights that legitimacy of knowledge remains central to this divide.

Curriculum Content Analysis

Curriculum documents from both systems were analyzed to identify underlying epistemological orientations and pedagogical assumptions.

Table 3: Comparative Curriculum Analysis

Dimension	School Curriculum	Madrassa Curriculum	Interpretation
Knowledge Type	Secular, scientific, applied	Religious, textual, doctrinal	Dual epistemology
Teaching Approach	Inquiry, analysis, application	Memorization, recitation	Pedagogical divergence
Assessment Style	Exams, critical evaluation	Oral/written memorization tests	Assessment rigidity vs flexibility
Teacher Role	Facilitator	Authority figure	Power asymmetry
Learning Outcome	Skills, employability	Religious scholarship	Divergent objectives

The curriculum analysis confirms a structural epistemological divide. School curricula emphasize modern scientific reasoning and skill development, while madrasa curricula prioritize preservation of religious knowledge through memorization and textual fidelity. This reinforces

institutional separation and limits epistemic integration.

Discourse Analysis of Interview Narratives
Discourse analysis revealed how participants linguistically constructed meanings around education, authority, and legitimacy.

Table 4: Key Discursive Patterns

Discursive Category	Example Linguistic Pattern	Analytical Meaning
Knowledge Hierarchy	“Real knowledge is...” / “True education is...”	Competing epistemic authority
Modern vs Traditional	“Western education vs Deeni education”	Binary construction
Legitimacy Claims	“Only scholars understand religion”	Authority-based knowledge validation
Historical Framing	“Colonial system created separation”	Postcolonial interpretation
Moral Framing	“Secular education lacks values”	Ethical justification discourse

The discourse patterns demonstrate that education is not neutrally described but ideologically constructed. Participants from both systems legitimize their own epistemology while questioning the other, reinforcing a binary knowledge structure rooted in historical and

cultural narratives.

Thematic Integration Model

The integration of interview data, curriculum analysis, and discourse findings produced a conceptual thematic model.

Table 5: Integrated Analytical Model

Analytical Layer	Core Finding	Theoretical Link
Individual Narratives	Perceived divide between systems	Social constructionism
Institutional Texts	Structural separation of curricula	Epistemology of education
Discourse Practices	Language of superiority and legitimacy	Foucauldian power relations
Historical Context	Colonial epistemic categorization	Postcolonial theory

This layered model demonstrates that the school-madrasa divide is not only institutional but also discursive and historically produced, sustained through everyday language, curriculum structures, and socio-political narratives.

Triangulation of Findings

To ensure analytical rigor, findings were triangulated across three data sources:

Table 6: Triangulation Summary

Data Source	Contribution	Key Insight
Interviews	Lived experiences and perceptions	Social meaning of divergence
Curriculum	Structural knowledge systems	Institutional epistemology
Discourse	Ideological framing	Power and legitimacy construction

Triangulation confirmed strong convergence across data sources, strengthening the validity of

findings. All three datasets consistently indicate a systemic epistemological and pedagogical divide

reinforced through institutional, ideological, and historical mechanisms.

Postcolonial Interpretation of Findings

Guided by postcolonial theory, the analysis reveals that the school-madrassa dichotomy reflects a colonially inherited epistemic dualism. The categorization of knowledge into “religious” and “secular” aligns with Orientalist frameworks that historically separated faith-based and rational-scientific knowledge systems.

Participants’ narratives suggest that this divide continues to shape:

- Knowledge legitimacy
- Institutional authority
- Curriculum design
- Pedagogical practice

Thus, the divergence is not merely educational but epistemological and political in nature.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a deeply entrenched **epistemological and pedagogical divergence** between school and madrassa education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This divergence is not merely structural but fundamentally rooted in competing conceptions of knowledge, authority, and learning. School education is largely characterized by modern, secular, and skill-oriented epistemologies, whereas madrassa education is grounded in classical Islamic traditions emphasizing textual fidelity, memorization, and moral-religious formation.

The analysis demonstrates that both systems operate within distinct epistemic boundaries that shape their pedagogical practices. Schools prioritize inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and standardized assessment mechanisms, while madrassas emphasize teacher-centered instruction, reverence for textual authority, and oral reproduction of knowledge. This pedagogical contrast reflects broader epistemological differences regarding what constitutes valid knowledge.

Importantly, the study highlights that this divergence is not accidental but historically produced. Guided by postcolonial theory,

particularly Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, the findings suggest that the current duality between religious and secular education systems reflects colonial-era classifications of knowledge. These classifications institutionalized a separation between “religious” and “modern” knowledge systems, a divide that continues to structure educational practices in Pakistan today. Furthermore, discourse analysis reveals that both groups construct legitimacy through contrasting narratives of authority. While madrassa scholars emphasize spiritual authenticity and religious legitimacy, school educators prioritize academic credentials and global knowledge standards. This mutual exclusivity reinforces institutional fragmentation and limits epistemic integration.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the educational landscape in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is shaped by a persistent dual epistemological system consisting of school and madrassa education. These systems are not merely parallel institutions but represent fundamentally different worldviews regarding knowledge production, transmission, and validation.

The research confirms that epistemological divergence is deeply embedded in curriculum structures, pedagogical practices, and institutional discourses. While schools align with modern scientific rationality and global educational frameworks, madrassas remain anchored in classical Islamic epistemology. This divergence creates limited interaction between the two systems, resulting in intellectual and pedagogical isolation.

Ultimately, the study argues that the school-madrassa divide is a socially constructed and historically conditioned phenomenon, sustained through discourse, institutional design, and inherited colonial epistemologies. Addressing this divide requires more than policy reform; it demands a reconceptualization of knowledge integration within Pakistan’s broader educational philosophy.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry several important theoretical, policy, and educational implications.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to postcolonial education literature by demonstrating how colonial epistemologies continue to shape contemporary educational dualism. It extends discourse on knowledge systems in South Asia by highlighting how religious and secular education are socially constructed categories rather than inherently separate domains.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest the need for educational reforms that promote curricular dialogue and epistemic integration. The rigid separation between religious and secular education limits national cohesion and restricts students' intellectual mobility across systems.

From an educational perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of pedagogical innovation in madrassas and value-based integration in schools. A more inclusive framework of education could enhance critical thinking, ethical grounding, and employability among students from both systems.

Future Directions

Future research should explore comparative studies across different provinces of Pakistan to determine whether similar epistemological divides exist beyond Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also be employed to measure the broader societal impact of this educational dualism.

Further studies could examine student perspectives, as this study primarily focused on teachers and scholars. Longitudinal research could also explore how graduates from both systems integrate into professional and social life. Additionally, future research should investigate policy experiments aimed at curriculum integration and evaluate their effectiveness in bridging epistemological gaps.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Integration:

Policymakers should explore frameworks that allow selective integration of secular and religious knowledge without undermining the core identity of either system.

2. Pedagogical Reform in Madrassas:

Madrassas should gradually incorporate critical thinking, analytical writing, and contemporary subjects alongside traditional Islamic sciences.

3. Teacher Training Programs:

Both school and madrasa educators should be provided with professional development opportunities to enhance pedagogical diversity and cross-system understanding.

4. Inter-System Dialogue:

Structured academic forums and exchange programs should be introduced between school and madrasa teachers to reduce epistemic isolation.

5. Policy Recognition of Madrasa Education:

Madrassas should be formally engaged in national education planning to ensure inclusivity and standardization without compromising religious autonomy.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research is geographically limited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other regions of Pakistan or similar contexts.

Second, the study relies primarily on qualitative data, which, while rich in depth, does not allow for statistical generalization. The subjective nature of interpretivist research may also introduce interpretive bias despite efforts to ensure rigor and triangulation.

Third, the study focuses mainly on teachers and scholars, excluding students, policymakers, and curriculum designers, whose perspectives could provide additional insights into the epistemological divide.

Finally, due to the sensitive nature of madrasa education, some participants may have provided

socially desirable responses, which could influence the authenticity of certain narratives.

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