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Exploring the Referentiality of Analogue Images - A Case Study of Documentary Photographs of the Holocaust

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Abstract

The key-argument used throughout the analysis rests on the idea that there can be only partial referentiality to analogue photographs, as illustrated in the photographs taken of Holocaust reality, which will constitute my case study. In other words, to refuse to claim mastery over the impossible through photography is a necessary acceptance of the events’ essential incomprehensibility as well as a tender rejection of the self’s ability to take in the other’s psyche and bodily sufferings. In this context, the fragile possibilities and the risks facing those who attempt to take Holocaust-related photographs can only reside in their “ability to restage history as a pathway toward retrospective and contemporary alterity, toward an otherness that envisions respectful distance and invites partial palpability” (Susan Sontag) It is precisely this sort of “respectful” approach to representing the Holocaust through rethinking documentary photography that I attempt to analyze. And the motivation behind it rests mainly on the fact that this difficult mandate to speak for the other, to bear witness validates and substantiates my departing premise that the photographs, even analogue ones are sometimes compelled to make do with only a partial referentiality.

Keywords: photographic representations, traumatic reenactment, semi-referentiality
The idea of the present paper came subsequent to reading a passage from a visual culture reader in which the author maintained that a substantive exploration of the meanings of visual images has to envisage a parallel investigation into the “three sites at which the meanings of images are made: the site of production, the site of the image itself, and the site of its audiening.” (Gillian 165) That is, how an image is made, what it looks like, and how it is seen – as the three crucial ways in which a visual image becomes culturally meaningful.

The remarks stand in need of extensive and lengthy argumentation, yet thoroughness can be achieved only by narrowing down the scope of analysis. Consequently, to all intents and purposes, the undertaken investigation will focus upon a particular type of image, the photograph and, equally, upon a particular site wherefrom meaning is exacted: namely that of the image itself.

With the advent of digital images, easily decomposable in a pixilated echafodage and, as easily recomposable in fictitious, most often than not referent-free representations – or better said constructions – comparisons have been drawn between such artificial images and analogue ones. The latter have always been set as an example of verisimilitude, of truthfulness to life, as faithful mirrorings not a precise referentiality, of constructedness, and consequently set as an example of Vico’s verum factum.

Without refuting the claims made against the digitalization of images, we propose to relativise the tenets of analogue image theory, arguing that not even identifiable referents can safeguard the consummate indexicality of “faithful” renderings. The key-argument which we will deploy throughout the analysis will rest on the idea that there can be only partial referentiality to analogue photographs – both inherent in their status, as Susan Sontag seems to maintain, and voluntary, willed partiality, as illustrated in the photographs taken of Holocaust reality, which will constitute, otherwise, our case study.

As Susan Sontag maintains, in her study In Plato’s Cave, “all photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s mortality, mutability” and vulnerability – the aspect which our case study undertakes to explore. But, if it is inherent in the status of a photograph to be – as the same author says – “both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence”, what would it mean, then, to create a representation of the Holocaust – as attempted in exhibitions organized in Western museums, upon which Andrea Liss, in her book: “Trespassing through shadows” dwells lengthily – a representation that would render it accessible, understandable?

Among the many dangers of such an undertaking – as Liss argues – would be to place the event in the framework of the normal, as if they could be historically assimilated (Liss 118-9). If the Holocaust could be falsely assimilated through accurate, highly realistic photographic representations, then it risks being explained away, covered over. The interesting path to follow would be, then – for visual culture – to investigate alongside the premises set by postmodern image theoreticians, to what extent are images allowed to deal with a faithful referentiality, what are the protocols of photograph-taking so as not to jeopardise the unutterable of an experience which has, nevertheless, to be “presented” to the public.

As expected, the impulse – through photograph-taking – would be to do the events justice, lest they might remain in obscurity but, on the other hand, the gap between the acts of cruelty and their representation may prove to be too vast for “justice”. Hence, Lyotard’s notion of the differend, the sign and the reminder that justice – in the case of the Holocaust – goes far beyond any justice that could be granted.

What faithful “renderings” of the traumatic experience arise in the beholder is, then, a feeling of trespassing, as defined by Liss: “[t]o trespass is to go across, to transgress, to die – that is the bottom line. Then to exceed the bounds of what is lawful, right or just. To offend, encroach on another’s privileges, rights, privacy (emphasis mine)”. We may argue then, that it is precisely this trespass over violated rights that justifies breaking open privacy in the name of evidence. And here, again, we might mention Lyotard’s insistence on the differend, or the immeasurable injustice done to the victims, to which representation tries to counter a redress.

Jacques Derrida, in “Memories for Paul de Man” addresses the topic along similar lines, as deference owed to someone whose pain cannot be understood, but only acknowledged: “We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia; […] where the possible remains impossible. And then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us like an unborn child, like a future. And, inversely, the failure succeeds: an aborted interiorisation is, at the same time, a respect for the other as the other, a sort of tender rejection.”
In other words, to refuse to claim mastery over the impossible through photography is a necessary acceptance of the events’ essential incomprehensibility as well as a tender rejection of the self’s ability to take in the other’s psyche and bodily sufferings. In this context, the fragile possibilities and the risks facing those who attempt to take Holocaust-related photographs can only reside in their “ability to restage history as a pathway toward retrospective and contemporary alterity, toward an otherness that envisions respectful distance and invites partial palpbility (emphasis mine)”

It is precisely this sort of “respectful” – and, as the theoretician defines it, “postmodern” – approach to representing the Holocaust through rethinking documentary photography that we attempt to look into and analyse. And the motivation behind it rests mainly on the fact that this difficult mandate to speak for the other, to bear witness – which is to attempt the task, yet acknowledge its inevitable impossibilities – validates and substantiates at the same time our departing premise that the photographs, even analogue ones are sometimes compelled to make do with only a partial referentiality.

This becomes obvious in the extreme care with which museum planners undertake the task of presenting artifacts and photographs as stand-ins for the traumatic history of mass murder and irretrievable loss. “Whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past” – the question (posed by two psychoanalysts cited by Liss) in relation to the role of psychoanalysis in confronting survivors with their trauma – may be said to echo throughout the “staging” of such an exhibition. Another psychoanalyst’s anxieties (Ralph Appelbaum’s) about transforming trauma into a narrative story, imagistically sequential and coherent, what he characterises as the problems of “negotiating between making order out of chaos and being afraid to do it.” (Liss 135), murmur the ambiguity of the task.

Because to suffer is one thing, another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, “which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them,” Susan Sontag thinks. “Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more and more. Images transfix. Images anaesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real.” (Sontag 50) Not to mention that the quality of feeling – including moral outrage – that people can “muster” in response to photographs of the massacred also depends on the degree of their familiarity with the images.

It is an acknowledged fact that photographs are used to stimulate a moral “impulse” – so to say – but the images that mobilise conscience are always linked to a given historical situation – the more general they are, the less likely they would probably be to be effective. That’s why, maybe, a photograph that represents some zone of misery cannot exact a reaction from the public opinion unless there is an appropriate context of feeling and attitude, “Photographs cannot create (emphasis mine) a moral position, but they can reinforce one and can help build a nascent one,” (Sontag 48) “[t]hough an event has come to mean” – she goes on – “precisely something worth photographing, it is still ideology (in the broadest sense) that determines what constitutes an event. There can be no evidence, photographic pr otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized.” (Sontag 48)

Regaining position – after this digression into the “utilitarian” aspects of photography – we will further our investigation into the imperative of quasi-representability and semi-referentiality of trauma-related photographs. As psychoanalysts theorise, trauma creates an impermeable net that “traps” the event, making access to it difficult and uncontrollable. The workings of trauma may be said to signal a warning to those who attempt to represent such violent experiences. Its protective mechanisms, which attempt to ward off access to the memory of the events for the individual could be interpreted as a sign to be on guard against equating disclosure of the events with lucid understanding. For a historian like Saul Friedlander – cited in Andrea Liss – “working through” the events involves: “the imperative of rendering as truthful an account as documents and testimonials will allow, without giving in to the temptation of closure. Closure in this case would represent an obvious avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive and opaque (emphasis mine)”. Put differently, working through means for the historian to face the dilemma which, according to Jean Francois Lyotard, we try to escape in the face of “Auschwitz”: “The silence” – writes Lyotard – “that surrounds the phrase “Auschwitz was the extermination camp” is not a state of mind (etat d’ame), it is sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.”

The issue at stake is that the telling of the event cannot fit into a cohesive narrative and Friedlander offered the art of self-aware commentary – a methodology that distinguishes many
postmodern artists’ projects – as a way out of closure, as a way to guard against facile explanations.

Friedlander’s warning to historians is also imperative to – as far as Andrea Liss is concerned – for artists: “representations [of the Holocaust] must retain an aspect of traumatic reenactment, deeply imprinted on the psyche but beyond facile understanding.” Although, Liss thinks, there can be no definitive “solutions” to the imperative to “respectfully memorialize, yet unflinchingly confront” the realities, the author forwards one, nonetheless. And this would rest on the photographic representations’ remaining infused with the crucial opaqueness that Friedlander wrote about to which she refers as “translucent mimesis”, and which Andrea Huyssen characterized in his book: Urban Palimpsests. The Politics of Memory as “mimetic approximation.”

“No matter how much representation of the Holocaust may be fractured by geography or subject position, ultimately it all comes down to unimaginable, unspeakable and unrepresentable horror. Post-Holocaust generations […] can only approach that core by what I call mimetic approximation, a mnemonic strategy which recognizes the event in its otherness and beyond identification or therapeutic empathy, but which bodily innervates some of the horror and pain in the slow and persistent labour of remembrance.” This technique is in concurrence with Susan Sontag’s belief that any photograph has multiple meanings. Indeed, to see something in the form of the photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination. The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image – according to the same author – is to say: “There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit – what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.” Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything are, therefore, inexhaustible invitations to deductions, speculation and fantasy about the potential reference lying behind.

In this light, we could emit a preliminary concluding remark: namely that the indexicality of an analogue image (photograph) stands in a synecdochical – we would say – relation to reality, as a sort of a pars pro toto, never the ultimate thing to rely upon, but always liable to supplementary probings and ponderings. If we add to this the theoretical conclusions of the analysis undertaken on documentary photographs of the Holocaust – which prompt us to regard the relation that holds between reality and the image of it as a quasi-tautological one, as Barthes would have termed it – then we can finally close the loop of our argumentation that images as a whole, including analogue ones can only account for a partial referentiality.

To conclude, we would say, following in the footsteps of Susan Sontag, that the need to have reality “confirmed” and experience “enhanced” by photographs can be grasped as an “aesthetic consumerism” (Sontag 52) to which everyone seems to be now addicted. “Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution. Poignant longings for beauty, for an end to probing below the surface, for a redemption and celebration of the body of the world – all these elements of erotic feeling are affirmed in the pleasure we take in photographs.” (Sontag 52) But other, less liberating feelings are expressed as well. It would not be wrong, then, to speak of people having a compulsion to photograph – in Sontag’s terms – to turn experience itself into a way of seeing.

Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with having a photograph of it and participating in a public event comes more and more to be equivalent to looking at it in photographed form. The French Mallarmé – mentioned by Sontag – said that everything in the world exists in order to end in a book. And the amendment to it came peremptorily: “Today everything exists to end in a photograph.”
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Social Context in Education: A Study of Senior Secondary Students from Low Socio-Economic Background in India

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Abstract

Mainstream educational psychology determines an individual’s ability by performance on various intelligence and aptitude tests. A student’s identity is defined by academic outcomes in terms of success or failure. This is rooted in the positivist assumption in psychology about an individual as independent, context free and exclusive. But, in real life settings an individual has multiple identities of gender, race, ethnicity, caste (specific to India) and social class. All these social identities influence behavioral outcomes such as educational achievement. Social context of students also comprises of interactions and influence of parents at home and teachers at school that affects student’s educational experiences. There has been a constant denial of socio-cultural contextual influences on a student’s academic performance prevalent in the psychology of academic achievement.

An ethnographic research was conducted as part of this study to understand the social context of students from low socio-economic background in India. In-depth interviews were conducted with students, their parents, and teachers. Thematic analysis was used to examine the interviews. Findings indicate that parents despite living in poverty send their children to school with a hope for their better life. But the teachers have very low expectations from students and think that children will become like their parents. Further, student’s belongingness to poor social class and backward caste only increases their vulnerability to experience academic underachievement.

Keywords: Psychology, intelligence, identities, and social context
“Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world”- Nelson Mandela

Education is a basic human right and the core of human capabilities. Education is the road for better job opportunities, high quality of life and contributes to human capital which optimizes the economic growth of a country (World Development Report, 2018). Beyond this instrumental value of education, it has a bigger role in bringing social change. The dream of an equitable society is obstructed by barriers of all kinds of existing social inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and caste (specific to India). The question, whether the current education system is fulfilling its very purpose of social change or is it reproducing existing social inequalities? This question is triggered from the enormous social, political, cultural, and economic changes occurring across the globe and its influences on education. In the domain of education, academic underachievement is considered a major problem. There is a plethora of empirical studies in mainstream educational psychology focused on addressing and intervening to resolve the issue of underachievement specifically of disadvantaged groups- Blacks, women, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds (SES).

A student’s identity is determined by the academic outcomes. Academic success in terms of high marks or grades achieved is the most desirable outcome expected from the student. Academic failure is understood as something that is indicative of less ability or less intelligence in a student. Also, how failure is perceived by others for instance, it is indicated by parents and teachers from this popular expression, “You should have worked harder!” But, very less often we attempt to think about why it happened? What contributed to an experience of failure? This will require us to step back from the academic outcome of failure and refocus on the student more specifically on the social context or where the student comes from. What happens when there’s too much focus on academic outcomes is that the interventions developed to resolve the problem of underachievement or failure are only focused on improving students’ abilities for instance- plethora of empirical work in psychology is focused on the need for students to have a growth mindset for better academic performance. Another example is the way poor academic performance of girls in mathematics and science is understood as stem stereotype rooted in the belief that girls lack the intellect and ability to do well than boys in science and technology subjects. When we assume the root of academic failure is in the individual, we tend to create interventions narrowly and work on improving the inside of a person (abilities) denying the outside (social context) of the person. This is rooted in the positivist assumption of mainstream educational psychology that assumes individuals are independent and mutually exclusive. Interventions focused on improving students’ abilities may trigger some temporary positive academic outcomes but, those changes will not be sustainable. Since, the educational process does not consist of only the students.

Although, students are the central core of education but, a student is intertwined with parents on one hand and teachers on the other. A student’s maximum time is spent at home where parents are the people they mostly interact with and school where teachers are the people they mostly engage with. When we step back from student’s academic outcomes, we can see the social context of student comprising of home context with parents and school context with teachers. What happens in each of these contexts? How do parents affect students’ academic experiences? How do teachers influence student’s educational experiences? Is there a cooperative or a conflicting relationship between parents and teachers in the education context? How is this relationship affecting students? Dwelling deeper into the social identity of a student which is comprised of social class, caste and gender that can too influence their experience of education. The present study engages in all these questions to understand social context in education.

Education is an interdisciplinary area of research studied by various social science disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political sciences among others. Academic achievement has been a popular area of research in psychology to understand education. The present study aimed at unboxing the story behind academic outcomes of success or failure which required us to understand each context the student lives and experiences during the educational process. The triarchic relationship between students, parents and teachers is the key to really understand the experience of education for students. A conducive parent- child-teacher relationship is desirable for positive academic experience of a student. But, in real life settings when parents and teachers come from different social contexts and have different expectations from the child as well as from each other, there might be conflict with a possibility of disturbing educational process for the student.
Understanding the social context of students is not just important because it tells us where the student comes from and the process of academic outcomes but, also to design interventions created to improve the academic performance of students by knowing the roots of the problem. The first step to do this is to step back from academic outcomes and refocus on the student which is what has been attempted through this study. For instance- A student failed in mathematics and English. The popular explanation to this problem is that student didn’t work hard for exams. To improve the academic performance, the student is supposed to study more, take tuition classes and give more hours to both subjects. But, there may be various other reasons for failing for example- the student might be coming from a very poor background. And, his father was unwell so, he had to work in his absence due to which he couldn’t go to school. Missed his classes and lacked the academic inputs needed to study so, he failed. Understanding the social context provides an enriching experience of understanding the deep contextual roots of academic failure which are not limited to student’s intelligence.

The Psychology of Academic Achievement

Academic achievement has received attention of a large number of researchers in psychology. A wide range of research findings have analyzed the factors that influence and correlate with academic achievement. The review article, “The Psychology of Academic Achievement” (Winne & Nesbit, 2010) analyzed and contextualized the empirical work in various strands of research in the area of academic achievement. The various factors influencing academic achievement can be classified into individual factors such as cognition, meta-cognition, interest and motivation. Contextual factors such as parents, teachers, peers, social class, gender, race and ethnicity have been examined in terms of their influence on academic achievement.

Individual factors that influence Academic Achievement

The first strand of research in the domain of academic achievement comes from cognitive psychology. Studies indicated that heuristics can promote learning such as contiguity effects, spacing effect, cognitive flexibility and coherence effects etc. Neuropsychological studies indicated a relationship between executive functioning and academic achievement. Executive functioning has been shown to relate to mathematics (Bull, Espy, & Wieber, 2008; Bull & Scerif, 2001; Espy et.al; 2004; Geary, 1993), reading (Helland & Asbjornsen, 2000; Swanson, 1999), reasoning (van ser Slus, de Jong, & van der Leij, 2007) and performance (Latzman et.al, 2009). Research evidence indicates that cognitive strategies are designed to get the individual to some cognitive goal or sub goal and meta-cognitive strategies are used to monitor cognitive strategies. These facilitate a learner’s academic achievement.

The second strand of research on academic achievement comes from Meta Cognitive paradigm. Winne and Nesbit (2010) elaborated the relevance of meta-cognition in academic achievement:

Meta cognitive achievements are identified as alertness to occasions to monitor, having and choosing useful standards of monitoring, accuracy in interpreting the profile generated by monitoring, having and choosing useful tactics or strategies, feeling motivated to act and modifying the environment that affords the chosen action. (p. 657).

The cognitive and meta-cognitive paradigm indicated the assumption in mainstream educational psychology that academic achievement of an individual can be understood only by analyzing the cognitive processes of the learner. There are so many other factors that can affect academic achievement beyond one’s own cognition. One such factor is motivation that can influence the need for achievement. The three most prominent approaches of motivation are need for achievement, expectancy-value theory and goal theories. According to Murray (1938), the need for achievement is one of the basic human needs. McClelland and colleagues advocated that the need for achievement results from the conflict of needs to approach success and avoid failure. The third strand of research on academic achievement comes from the motivational paradigm. The vast span of theories and empirical work in this area has been surveyed by Covington (2000) and Meece et.al. (2006).

Dweck’s (2003) work provided evidences that achievement goal construct is the reason why children of equal ability display divergent responses to failure. Achievement goals were seen as “networks or patterns of beliefs and feelings about success, effort, ability, errors, feedback and standard of evaluation” (Ames & Archer, 1987, 1988). They assessed student’s perceptions of their classrooms in
terms of an emphasis on mastery goals and performance goals. Mastery goals (also called as task involvement goals) focus is on the development of competence or the attainment of task mastery. Performance goals (also called as ego involvement) focus is on attainment of normative competence. Nicholl’s work propagated that “high ability is equated with learning and improvement through effort and the purpose of achievement is to develop high ability” (1976, 1978, and 1980). There are two goals; task involvement (seeking to develop skills by learning) and ego involvement (focus on outperforming others). Winne and Nesbit (2010) argued that this theoretical framework faces the following challenges:

Learners are not uni-dimensional in their goal orientations (Pintrich, 2000), self-reports have been the only basics for researchers to identify goal orientations but, goals may be unstable and the self-reports are also contextually sensitive (Hadwin et al. 2001). These challenges reflected the need for performance based measures which can raise achievement.” (p.659)

Student’s self-perceptions of competence are closely related to academic achievement and their self-concept. Giota (2006) advocated that “academic self-concept is divided into self-concepts in particular subject areas, such as mathematics and English, and non-academic self-concept is divided into social, emotional and physical self-concepts”. According to Assor and Connell (1992) having inaccurate self-perceptions of competence maybe of advantage if they are higher than should be expected, given actual achievement. It was reported that inflated self-reports were related to positive achievement while, deflated self-assessments lead to negative achievements. Research also shows that both mastery and performance goals leads to positive self-perceptions. Giota (2006) found that “there is a positive relationship between mastery goals and adaptive outcomes while, there a negative relationship between performance goals and academic achievement.” The findings of this study indicated that a differentiated approach is needed to assess student’s self-perceptions of competence. Further, research indicates that test anxiety was related to academic achievement. Hembree(1988) concluded that test anxiety leads to poor achievement thereby causing defensiveness and fear of negative evaluations.

There have been studies that look at the relationship between constructs of self, motivation and academic achievement. According to Markus (1977)”self-schemas are cognitive frameworks about the self, derived from past experiences and influence that information related to oneself contained in the social experiences”. Academic self-schemas are defined as student’s cognitive frameworks derived from their earlier experiences and that influences student’s cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects in learning. Ng, C.C (2014) argued regarding the academic self-concepts:

Evidence indicates that it is possible for students to develop an academic self-schema involving desire or fear in relation to different school subjects. Positive academic self-schemas are valued self-perceptions associated with successful learning experiences that lead to positive self-worth. Negative self-schemas are feared self-perceptions associated with worries; apprehension and repeated failure experience (pg. 731).

These challenges with the goal orientations led to advanced research in the area of interest. Interest refers to the choices that learners make to engage, to attend and to concentrate on a particular activity. The research in the area of interest and learning comprised of two kinds of interest- individual interest (quality of interest) and situational interest (interaction between person and environment). The major challenge with the research on interest has been that interest as a construct dynamically interacts with other variable that mediates the effect of interest itself. The research in the area of academic achievement progressed with analyzing the contextual factors and their influence on the academic achievement.

**Contextual factors that influence Academic Achievement**

Home is the first context in which an individual exists and parents are the main influencers for students. Studies indicate that parental influence on child’s academic achievement is important. “Maternal characteristics, including parenting style and maternal personal adjustment, have been shown to have a clear impact on children’s development” (Kurstjens & Wolke, 2001; Okagaki, 2001). There is abundant literature on the important influence parental involvement has on the academic achievement.

Wilder (2014) did a meta-synthesis of the studies done on the relationship between academic achievement and parental involvement. The results indicated that the relationship between parental
involvement and academic achievement was positive. Further, it was found that the relationship was strongest when parental involvement was understood as parental expectations in terms of academic achievement of their child. The result of the meta-analysis by Fan and Chen’s indicated that the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement should not be generalized across different areas of academic achievement. The findings indicated that parental aspiration and expectation for educational achievement had a significant relationship with academic achievement than parent’s supervision of children at home.

School is the second context the child enters with the purpose of learning and education. Teachers are the most important influencers for students at school. What a teacher says when a student gets good or poor marks has an influence on student’s future academic performance. What a teacher expects from the student can hugely influence his/her performance. Does the teacher really understand why a student experiences failure? Can he/she do something to help a student perform better? All these questions encompass teacher’s engagement in students’ academic life.

Research indicates that teachers have different expectations from students in their classrooms. Weinstein and her colleagues (1993) used the Teacher treatment inventory to determine whether students perceived differential treatment by teachers of high and low achievers. They found that in comparison to low achievers students felt that teachers interacted more positively with high achieving students, that they had higher expectations from them. In contrast to high achievers, students reported that teachers were more negative towards low achievers and directed their learning far more frequently. Babad’s work (1993, 1998) has shown that whereas teachers reported providing more emotional support to low ability students, the children perceived the opposite. He reported that the teachers did endeavor to display warmth and emotional support to low expectation students but that students were able to determine that such displays were not genuine. And, teacher’s natural affection for the high expectation students was understood despite them trying to control it.

Although, these empirical studies indicate the important role parents and teachers have in students’ academic life, seldom researchers examine the interactional influence of parents and teachers on students further affecting their academic performance. The present study examines this curiosity. Further, to examine the influence of student’s social identity of social class/SES, gender, race and ethnicity, there are empirical studies examining their influence on academic achievement.

There’s one research study that examined the role of social class in the context of schooling (Markus, Stephens & Phillips, 2014). The authors advocated the influence of social class on the school:

"Though, school is considered the center of knowledge and excellence but, the middle class schools cannot be considered neutral spaces as the ideology, curriculum, practices and school culture focuses on maintaining the middle class American cultural ideal of expressive independence. (p. 618-21)"

While the schools in working class, low-income communities often reflect and promote the norms of hard interdependence which focuses not only an awareness of the influence of social contexts (Kraus et.al. 2009, 2012) but also focus on strength and toughness. The classroom experience in the working class schools is focused on cultivating the skills and values needed in working class occupation such as limited individual freedom, restricted access to class materials and supplies, more routine and structured activities throughout the day and stricter rules. While, the classroom experience in the middle class schools is focused on cultivating the skills and values needed for professional or managerial occupations such as ample amount of individual freedom, open access to class materials, complex and varied tasks, freedom of movement and activities, there is encouragement on asking questions and greater emphasis on creativity and challenging assumptions.

But, the disjuncture arises when a working class student attempts to study in a middle class school. Though, middle class school provides access to higher education for the working class students they become bicultural and get an opportunity to develop the expressive independence norms. This is a disadvantage as expressive independence is the only right way to be a student. The school culture prevents the working class students from realizing their full potential. For many working class students
guided by the norms of hard interdependence, expressive independence is often disconnected from their previous experiences at home and less likely to feel comfortable in the school setting.

While research in the area of academic achievement continued over several decades, the focus came down to gender as a social factor affecting the academic achievement. Raag et.al(2011) in their work on SES and gender found the following evidence:

Research in various parts of Africa showed underachievement of girls and various explanations were offered to account for girls’ low achievement, including sex-grouped schooling, family background, teachers’ gender and gendered school experiences. (p.4)

Kamwendo (2010) studied the Malawi culture in Central Africa where 51% of the population are women living with dominant gender stereotypes such as heavy domestic workload, lack of decision making, power and having careers meant only for girls. Some of the thematic findings from her study are:

the self-image of girls as low achievers, girls saw sexual relationships as a way of gaining financial support, girls pointed out that they had to do chores before going to school which made it difficult to concentrate in class, as they were tired and girls resist the position of underachievers(p.436).

Limitations in the work of psychology of academic achievement

This vast expanse of research in mainstream educational psychology encompasses wide individual and contextual factors but, there are prevalent gaps in the existing literature. First, researchers have exclusively studied the influence of home context in terms of parenting styles and school context in terms of influence of teachers and peers. But, in real life settings; a student experiences regular interactional influence of both contexts on academic achievement. In order to examine the role of social context on academic achievement specifically, of low SES students; it becomes crucial to examine this unexplored domain of research. Second, there has been too much emphasis on the academic outcomes. Less often there’s focus on the psychological processes that leads to experiences of academic failure or success. This too has been examined in the present study by understanding the role of social context.

Third, when examining the role of contextual factors on academic achievement in terms of effect of gender, SES, race and ethnicity; it’s rare to find an empirical study that examines the effect of two or more factors at a time such as when examining the influence of SES and gender on academic achievement, it has been found that many times if there’s a combination of such factors in one study; while, one factor which is mostly the research focus is studied and the other factor is controlled to avoid its effect on the independent variable.

Further, social identities of gender, race, and ethnicity are treated as demographic characteristics in empirical studies rather than identities that can explain experiences of disadvantage, discrimination and prejudice experienced by people. This not just obstructs the opportunity to understand the complex reality where multitude of identities of an individual affects academic experience but, brings out a methodological challenge feared by psychologists. It’s rooted in the tendency of psychologists to only focus on hypothesis testing and achieving significant values even, if it requires denying the presence of relevant factors affecting research objectives.

Present Study: Social Context in Education

Case Study

A 14-year-old girl studies in 9th grade in a Government School. Her results are out. She has failed in mathematics and English.

How do we explain this academic failure?

The popular explanation in this situation will be that the individual is responsible for this academic failure. She should have spent more hours into studying and gone to tuition classes.

Let’s look at this situation again.

A 14-year-old girl studies in 9th grade in a Government School. Her mother is a widow and father died when she was very young. Her mother is not educated and works as a maid at 5 households. The girl is
the second child and has 3 siblings. They have a one room home. The only source of family income is what her mother earns as a maid and her widow pension. One month before her exams, her mother was very ill and couldn’t go to work. Due to which she had to work on her mother’s behalf so, that her mother’s salary is not curtailed. She was going to work morning and evening in 5 households. Due to which she couldn’t go to school for 15 days at a stretch. When she got back to school, her peers bullied her for not being able to speak and write English. She came back home crying and told her mother, “I will never go back to school.”

Same question- How do we explain this academic failure?

Can we still hold the same explanation that if this student worked harder, she could have scored well? Do we need to dwell deeper into from “where the student comes from?” Can this help us to understand the academic failure in a more comprehensive manner? The answer in this situation is that we cannot only look at the scores of the student. But, dwell deeper into her social context. In this case, being a girl (gender), coming from a poor family (social class), widow mother (single parent) who is uneducated and works as a maid and adolescent who experienced bullying at school as she couldn’t speak English. All these factors puts the student in a vulnerable situation which negatively affected her academic experience.

“Where the student comes from” is a subtle reference for social context of an individual. According to Wikipedia, social context is the social environment, sociocultural context or milieu refers to the immediate physical and social setting in which people live or in which something happens or develops.

To examine the social context in education, 11 students – 5 boys and 6 girls studying in 11th and 12th grade from a Government school in New Delhi, India were interviewed. 5 teachers- 2 male and 3 female teachers of these students were interviewed. 7 parents- mothers including 2 widows (single parent) were interviewed. After the in-depth interviews were conducted, thematic analysis was implemented to bring out the major findings from the data.

**Education is as important as food**

Students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds (SES) are children to parents who migrated from villages to cities in the hope for a job and better quality of life. But, when they came to cities, they realize that for a good job, they need good education. Almost all of them are illiterate or less educated so, they have to do low paying jobs such as construction workers, sanitation or domestic help. Jobs like these are physically straining and they work as daily wage earners with no holidays. So, if they miss a day at work; they will not have food to feed their family for that day.

Despite this daily challenge of survival, low SES parents still send their children to school with the hope for a better life for them. One of the mothers shared in the interview that education is very important in fact it’s as important as the food they eat. Because of the challenges they have faced for not being educated. They are ready to work really hard as the silver lining for them is that all this struggle gets paid off if their children study well, get a good job and have a better life than them.

“My husband left us in 2007 and i was pregnant at that time. I was in a very bad condition during those days. I thought if my children can get educated, I can work hard for them. I started working in households as maid. I have 3 children but, it was difficult to sustain the family and education expenses. So, I sent my children back to village for 2 years. But, I always knew that they cannot get the education and facilities they need which they can get in a city. My children were also very worried about me and our life. My mother and everyone in my extended family asked me why I am going through so much trouble for educating children especially my daughter! As eventually she is supposed to get married. But, I knew that I studied only till 10th grade due to which I’m doing a menial job and if I was well educated; I could have had a better life. I told my children to study hard and I will work very hard for them. I told them to think of education being as important as the food they eat. I can never see my children doing the same work as I do” – Single mother

**Poor or no education of parents**

Research evidence indicates that parental education directly affects child’s educational outcomes. Low SES parents migrate from villages to cities for better job opportunities but, because they are not well
educated or illiterate; they end up into low paying jobs which affects their entire life. On one hand while, parents send their children to school so, that they get educated and have a better life than theirs but, on the other hand, parents being the important part of a student’s life and them not being educated has an influence on the academic experiences of the student. Therefore, parents are not able to provide the academic support to their children expected by teachers such as like helping them in their homework.

“No. I’m not capable to help my children in their homework. I’m not educated to help my children in their studies”- Mother

“I don’t want my children to do what I’m doing”

People migrate from their villages to cities in search for better job opportunities and have a better life. But, when they come to cities they get low paying jobs as causal laborers because they are not educated. Despite daily challenges of struggling to survive, they strive to send their children to schools so, that they receive education. As they know if they were educated they could have had a better job. They don’t want their children to face the poverty striven reality that they continue to face in life. This expression, “I don’t want my children to do what I’m doing” is deeply rooted in the feeling of guilt of not being educated, not being able to have and give a good life to their children.

“I’m not educated and I would never like my daughter to do the same work as I’m doing. My parents were not educated and worked as causal laborers. My mother used to work as maid in various households so, I used to accompany her. Sometimes, the house owner used to ask me to work in my mother’s absence and I used to do it. I used to get money from it and that made me greedy. I used to think education was not giving me anything while; this work was giving me money. But, today I realize how important education is and if I was educated I could have done so much. Without education one can do nothing. I would never want my children to do what I’m doing”- Mother

Ability stereotyping in classrooms

To understand the education experience of students and the teaching-learning process, it’s crucial to examine the classroom processes. Starting with the seating arrangement in terms who sits where? Who are the students sitting in the front benches and those sitting at the back benches? Do the students ask questions? Who are the ones who mostly ask questions? Does the teacher answer everyone’s questions?

Seating arrangement

Where a student sits in the classroom has an influence on classroom engagement i.e. interactions with the teachers and active participation in the learning process. Generally, in a class of say 40 students, it’s not possible for the teacher to keep an eye on all the students. But, those who sit in the front benches are directly in front of the teacher. So, the teacher may ask them questions frequently, give them feedback on their work and answer to their queries. While, those who sit at the back benches may not actively receive teacher’s feedback or because they are not in front of teachers eyes, they may not pay attention to what is being taught. They may not ask questions or answer them and the teacher may not even notice because of the physical distance between the student and teacher. Because of this, students may lose interest in studies. And, this affects the learning experience of the student and which directly affects the academic outcomes.

Most of the time, it’s believed that students who get good marks or are good in studies and the monitor sit in the front benches. They are also called, “intelligent” students. Those who sit at the back benches are seen as those “failure”, “poor” students or not good in studies. They are those who are seen to be not interested in studies.

“Students who sit in front benches are intelligent. And, those who sit at back benches are not interested in studies and poor in studies”- Male student

Asking Questions

Teachers asking questions to students is the best way to know if they understood the academic content taught to them. But, then teachers ask questions to which students? Most of the times teachers ask questions to students who are good in studies or are considered intelligent and questions asked by other students are often ignored. The high point of a teaching-learning process is when it’s not just the
teachers asking questions but, also the students asking questions as it shows curiosity and a positive learning experience for a student. But, do all students ask questions to the teacher when they don’t understand anything? Most of the times, it’s the “intelligent”, “good in studies” or the “monitor” who ask questions. Others remain silent and resist asking questions even when they want to because of the fear of being judged by both teachers and peers. Teachers may scold them and peers can make fun of them. This builds the understanding that it’s not just the seating arrangement which is ability based but, also the tendency to ask questions is conferred into identities such as “intelligent” and “weak” on children (Nambissan, G. 2009).

“No. I don’t ask questions to sir. As in I want to ask him but, he ignores my questions.”- Male student

“In my class there are 2-3 students who ask more questions. They are those students who are good in studies.”- Male student

**Low Teachers Expectations**

Teachers have a significant role in student’s life. A teacher’s feedback both positive and negative directly affects what student thinks about his/her competence. Research indicates that teachers have different expectations from students in their classrooms. Teachers who make more discrimination between high and low achievers may affect their student’s achievement outcomes and their self-perceptions. Rubie-Davies work (2005) has identified teachers having correspondingly high or low expectations for all students in their classrooms, i.e. that their expectations are at the class rather than the individual level.

“Students write incorrectly even when everything is written on the blackboard. From the total 50 students, 40 of them know nothing. You can conduct survey in any class and you will see that students don’t even know how to write a b c d! They can’t even copy 10 lines written on the blackboard. Government school students can only run stalls on roads, sell ice-cream. Leaving 2-4 students, rest 40 of them will not be able to do anything in life. No matter how well I teach, they will do what their parents are doing.”– English Teacher, Female.

One can only imagine if such a teacher enters a classroom where she thinks that students will ultimately engage in low paying jobs like their parents. No amount of teaching can change the student’s academic experience is just a subtle reminder for students that they are not good enough and would feel their teacher doesn’t trust them. This will only demolish some motivation that students have to feel appreciated by their teacher. This narrative also confirms the failure of purpose of education which is bringing social change and that can happen if a low SES student can have a good life through education. While, the parents don’t want their children to do what they are doing but, the teacher expects them to do what their parents are doing. This completely fails the very purpose of parents who are struggling each day but, still sending their children to school with a hope that they have a better future. This opens up a conflict in teacher and parent expectations as a major contributor of academic failure that low SES student’s experience.

**Conflicting parent-teacher relationship- A contributor to academic failure**

Students live in homes that are indicative of a poverty striven reality. Parents are not educated and are in low paying jobs. Still, strike to send their children to school with a hope of a better future for them. Belonging to a low socio economic background begins to affect the academic experiences of children when parents are not able to help in homework, not being able to attend parent- teacher meetings and are incapable to provide any academic support to their child. Further, when parents are not able to go to work; their children have to work instead to sustain their livelihood. Due to this, they miss their school and their academic performance suffers.

“Student’s parents work as rickshaw puller. Both parents work as casual laborers. In such a situation, child comes home and I know when I give them homework, they won’t be doing it. They can’t afford tuitions which can help in their studies. Leaving 10 students in the class, others won’t be able to do anything in life. The student’s family background in this government school is very poor. Parents are not educated, they have no knowledge and they don’t even come for parents teacher meetings (PTM)
which is the only opportunity to work together to improve student’s academic performance. The reality is these students will run stalls on roads just like their parents! “- Female teachers

Teachers come from different socio-economic reality than their students. They come from middle class backgrounds with years of education and teaching experience. Although, they understand the poor backgrounds of their students but, they use this understanding to blame the parents for poor academic performance of the students. Teachers think that poor family environment; children working in parent’s absence, uneducated parents and their non-participation in parent teacher meeting are the core roots of low academic performance of students. Teachers also have very poor expectations from their students and imagine them to be doing the same less paying jobs like their parents.

It’s the student who constantly juggles with parents wanting them to go to school despite all odds and teachers who have very low expectations from them while, thinking that they would become same as their parents. This chaos, conflict in socio-economic contexts, differential expectations from parents and teachers for the students is the core of low SES students’ academic experience. There’s negligible research interest in this area which can actually provide an explanatory construct for academic failure experienced by the students. The data indicates that good students are those who mostly ask questions, teachers respond to their questions, they are chosen to be monitors and are selected first for co-curricular activities over other children. Calarco (2011) finds that teachers expect students to be proactive learners- to go out of their way to ask questions, take charge of their educational experience and express their needs to the teachers. Students who are able to do all of this are seen to be intelligent, motivated and curious. And, those students who remain quiet, don’t ask questions, don’t participate in activities; they are seen to be lacking the drive and talent needed to succeed.

Just as teachers assume that students should be proactive learners, they assume that good parents are those who are highly involved, informed, assertive and advocate for their child. Teachers (who are middle class themselves) expect parents to take charge and influence their child’s educational experience. They expect parents to act as partners with the teacher. If parents act according to the teachers expectations, then, they think parents are highly committed to their children’s education otherwise; teachers think parents simply don’t care about their children’s education. For instance, if a teacher gives a negative feedback about child’s performance, a middle class parent will meet the teacher to improve child’s performance. While, a working class parent thinks that teacher is the expert who is primarily responsible for child’s performance. Because they are aware of their lower rank in the social hierarchy in relation to the teacher as well as their own limited experience navigating the education system. They may feel uncomfortable interacting with the teacher and are less equipped to have discussions with the teacher.

As discussed in the beginning of this paper that social context of a student consists of home and school context and also, the multitude of identities of social class, gender and caste affecting their experience of education. The sample of the present study consisted of students from low socio-economic status background (SES). How does belonging to lower social class affect education experience of students? This question has been dealt with in this paper. Low SES of a student is exemplified by their poor living conditions i.e. living in slum community, uneducated parents, and parents into low paying jobs.

Belonging to poor social class- A major contributor to academic failure

Poverty Striven Homes

Home is the first physical environment the individual is born in. Parents are the first social being the individual interacts with thereby also the first social environment where the learning of attitudes, behaviors and values happen. For a child to have an enriching life, learn, engage and be prepared for school requires conducive home. Is the experience of home same for every child? Is there anything like a good or conducive or safe home environment? Does every child get a conducive family environment where he/she can learn and grow?

When the questions focused on understanding the physical environment of a low SES student were examined; students shared in their interviews that their homes exemplify large family size, miserable life living in a slum community and increased vulnerability to violence.
Large family size

A large family size means more number of family members which indicates more resources needed to sustain the livelihood of each member. There’s a popular saying in rural areas in India that ‘with more children one has, means more hands to work’. But, in reality this saying falls straight as with more children, actually there are more mouths to feed. It builds up pressure on the breadwinner of the family. Considering a poor household, providing basic resources of food, clothing and shelter for all might be challenging. And, on top of these limitations; education for children may not always be a favorable choice but, a burden. Because of this, a lot of times children are seen working rather than studying.

Slum community

People migrate from villages to cities for better opportunities and to have a better life. Since, they are not educated they end up working as casual laborers and their income is very low. Due to which they can’t afford better living conditions and they resort to living in slums. According to Wikipedia, “a slum is a highly populated urban residential area consisting mostly of closely packed, decrepit housing units in a situation of deteriorated or incomplete infrastructure, inhabited primarily by impoverished persons”.

Generally, in a slum community 4-5 households live together and there are limited resources such as water, electricity. Lot of times, shortage of resources creates conflicts among them, leading to experiences of violence. It’s not a safe environment for children to live and study as shared by students in the interviews while, talking about their home, living conditions. In fact, one of the girls upon asking about the relevance of education she shared that if with education, she can a good job which can give her money and they can live in a better place.

“I live in JJ colony. People residing there often get into fights, arguments and conflicts”- Female student

“If I was from a high income family; we would have been living in a good place. If we lived in a society we could have lived with good people! But, we live in a slum community where there are children who use swear words to each other, they don’t have manners too” – Female student

Increased vulnerability to experience violence

Slum community entails people who are not educated, struggling to sustain their livelihood by working as casual laborers, constant pressure to feed the large family. With this poverty striven reality, creating stress leading them to engage in excessive alcohol drinking and indulgence in drug abuse. With this disturbed mindset, there are regular incidents of domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Due to which it’s not a conducive environment for anyone to live in especially for children it’s very unsafe. There’s increased vulnerability that individuals experience especially adolescent girls for experience of sexual violence.

“2 years back at the home where we lived in; the house owner behaved inappropriately towards my daughter. She was suffering from typhoid at that time due to which I had to leave her at home and go for work. By night when I came back from work; she was crying and shared everything that happened. People know that I go out for work and my children will be alone. This gives them good chance to do anything with them. I was as worried about my daughter as she’s an adolescent girl and if something bad happens to her. It won’t get alright. So, we moved out from that home” – Single mother

“The home environment is not conducive for students to study. Most of student’s father regularly consumes alcohol and engage in domestic violence”- Male Teacher

These narratives provide evidence to the poverty striven reality children are living in that’s not safe for them. In fact they are vulnerable to experiences of violence. We cannot even imagine how an individual is supposed to not just study but, attain good marks in a difficult home environment rooted in belonging to poorer social class.

Children working in parent’s absence

In an existing poverty striven reality where surviving each day is the key. Even, though parents think it’s important for their children to study than work; sometimes, in situations where the parent is unwell but, the work is imperative for daily survival there’s no choice but, the child has to work to suffice their
parent’s absence at work. But, when the child does work which means skipping school which leads to not just low attendance but, absenteeism in learning process. Therefore, affects the overall academic performance of the student.

“I failed in science and mathematics because my mother was very sick. And, in her absence I had to work in 5 households in the morning and evening. Due to which I had to miss school. Missed classes and had no idea what to do in exams!” – Female student

“I used to scold a student as he used to come late every day at school. I questioned him, why do you come late to school? Why do you bunk classes? And, he responded that he works at a garage with his father. He goes to work, then, go to school and go back to garage. He gets very tired so, comes late to school”– Female teacher

“Students studying in Government School can only run stalls of ice cream and other things just like their parents” – Female teacher

Living in a slum community is indicative of difficult physical environment low SES students have to live in. And, it’s just the start as the biggest aspect of dealing with the poverty striven reality on daily basics requires doing everything to maintain daily survival of the family. Narratives shared by the students provided evidences that in parent’s absence; their children were working as maids or at garage. As their parents are daily wage earners and missing a day at work means no food for the family for that day. So, even though parents work hard and send their children to school for a better life. But, instances like these they are forced to send their children for work to sustain the family’s livelihood. And, when they are working; they can’t go to school at the same time. They miss school which means missing classes and all the learning processes at school. This loss of academic engagement is then indicated by a negative academic outcome which is academic failure.

Experience of stigma emanating from belongingness to poorer social class

We have discussed above about how belonging to low socio economic background because of parent’s low education and low paying job debilitates students’ academic experience. But, coming from poor social class also brings out feelings of shame and escalates an experience of stigma. In one of the interviews a mother who works as a maid in the same school in which her daughter studies, her daughter experienced shame and stigma to see her mother working as a maid with this fear of being looked down upon by her peers. The mother also experienced feeling of guilt for being the reason for her daughter’s experience of humiliation such that she didn’t wanted her mother to come to her parent teacher meeting and her school trip.

“I work as a maid in my daughter’s school. At each parent teacher meeting, I tell my daughter that I would like to meet her teachers. But, she tells me not to come as she doesn’t feel good about it. I also feel that when her classmates and friends see me at this meeting knowing that I work as a maid at their school; they might ridicule her. I don’t want her to feel troubled because of me. I tell her that like her classmates she can also call me ‘aunty’ and not mother! She doesn’t say anything to me. A school trip was organized where I was asked to accompany the class to take care of all the students. But, it was my daughter’s class that was going for the trip. She didn’t want me to go for the trip. I had no choice but, to go as asked by the school. When I went for the trip, all the other kids were very happy clicking pictures with me. My daughter was standing alone at one corner and I was feeling bad for her. Her class teacher requested her to enjoy with her friends and me. She didn’t speak to me. Seeing her upset, I felt really bad as all other children were so happy. I was heartbroken and cried because my daughter was unhappy because of me!” Mother

Discussion

The present study examined the social context in education by examining students from low socio economic backgrounds (SES). Even though there are empirical studies in mainstream educational psychology analyzing the contextual factors that influence academic achievement, it still doesn’t provide a complete understanding of education experience of students. There are exclusive studies looking at the influence of parenting styles- home context and influence of teachers- school context. But, there are negligible studies examining the interactional influence of parents and teachers on
students’ academic experience. Further, there’s plethora of empirical studies exclusively examining the influence of race, SES, gender on academic achievement. The issue in these studies is two-fold first, that they examine the effect of one of the social identity at a time while, ignoring the other identities. For instance- there will be a study examining Blacks underachievement with gender as a sample characteristic but, only examining the effect of race on academic achievement and ignoring the possible influence of gender such as underachievement of black girls. Second, while there are other empirical studies that would merely treat these social identities as demographic characteristics in a study rather than social categories that can affect individual’s behavioral outcomes. These critical gaps existing in the psychology of academic achievement discussed here indicate a major challenge in psychological research.

This pattern of ignoring the analysis of interactional influence of home and school context and interactions between race, gender and SES indicate the narrow focus on hypothesis testing in psychology. This emanates from the tendency of research in psychology being guided by only achieving significant values rather than stepping up to understand the complex reality. The present study has attempted to break this pattern and dwell deeper into the academic life of a student rather than labeling the student as “intelligent” or “failure” based on academic outcomes. This helped in understanding how belonging to a poorer social class or low SES dominates student’s education experiences.

Students live in slum community with scare basic resources of livelihood. Parents are uneducated and employed in low paying jobs. Despite so many obstacles, they send their children to school with a hope of their better future. But, in situations where parents are sick; their children have to work. Due to which they miss their classes and all the classroom engagement which leads to academic failure. Even though teachers in their interviews claimed that parents are responsible for academic failure as they are not educated and do not provide any academic support. Teachers low expectations from their students that just like their parents they would too end by running ice-cream stalls on roads. Parents and teachers attempt to educate children but, all their efforts are bloggers down by the existing poverty striven reality students live in.

Therefore, to resolve the issue of academic underachievement or failure of low SES students, it is crucial to examine each context student lives in and relevant interventions need to be planned at the context of home, school, students, and policy level. Lastly, the hope is that together that can lead to a ripple effect of improved academic experiences of students.
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Impact of Political Regimes on Education System of Pakistan

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Abstract

Education is the strongest force on the side of fundamental change, and the importance of education in forming character and opinion is generally recognized. For social reconstruction, education is one of the most important social and political institutions. This research paper seeks to find out the impact of policies of post-colonial political regimes on educational system in Pakistan. An effort has been made to analyze the socio-political dimensions of different regimes which made different changes in syllabi and analyze the political interference in achieving the desired aims and objectives at the cost of education. Politics has deep impact over the institution of education which is genuinely discussed in this article. First part will discuss the different forms and levels of education existed in Pakistan. In second part of article, impact of political regimes on educational institutions in the society has been analyzed. In third part, main political issues are brought out into light which adversely and deeply affect the educational systems in Pakistan. Fourth and last part of article will present the suggestions and solutions for betterment of educational system while managing the relations with government in the country. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks were investigated through detailed qualitative research which directed to ascertain that how politics influence the educational sphere in postcolonial country.
Introduction

Education is an influential tool in forming, molding and developing national identity and character of individuals and communities. It provides strong basis for social integration and moral upgradation in any society. Politics and education together can form developed society and vice versa. Governments can promote, control and impose ideologies and strengthen identities in a society through formulation and implementation of curriculum and education infrastructure. Education system in Pakistan shows the relationship of politics and education and its results. Like other systems, education system of Pakistan traces its roots in colonial rule. Under British rule, colonial masters made drastic changes in education system to comply with colonial governance which was inherited to Pakistan. Despite the various changes, roots are not changed. Analytical and critical reasoning is usually discouraged in the name of religion and ideology.

Like education, political system has also imprints of colonial governance. Nation who fought for a common ideology for a common purpose got fragmented as achieved the set goal. After attaining a separate country, power politics started. Ulemas, who were against the partition, migrated to new country and started preaching their religious ideologies. Right and left wings developed and nation surprised by highly contrasting versions of ideologies. Political history of Pakistan didn’t present a smooth, free and consistent set of government. Instead it is amalgamation of civil and military rule and power was lumbering between these both authorities. Already weak education infrastructure get little space to develop and flourish effectively. Various regimes especially military regimes in Pakistan engineered these policies to support their authorities and to achieve their political ends. Deep analysis of process of policy formulation in Pakistan, it can be claimed that governments in Pakistan do not act autonomously. Other actors including international and national non-governmental organizations influence government in their act of policy formulation.

Education system in Pakistan is not uniform and divided on the basis of language, class and religion. This inculcates the seeds of disintegration in pluralistic society of Pakistan. There is a dire need to unify the education system by competent authorities and accelerate the process of nation building by introducing advanced way of learning accessible to every person of the society. It is imperative that Pakistan transforms its education system in order to develop integrated society. Policy making and implementation by government has deep effects on educational system in Pakistan. Commandably articulated policies fails to address the problems and needs at local and national level. Lack of effective implementation of policies made them useless drafts. Clear vision and resolution of conflicting issues regarding women education, medium of instruction, science and research must be achieved as well as unnecessary political interference must be avoided to enhance the quality of education and develop strong education infrastructure in the country. Islamic ideology must be used to integrate the society instead of halting the process of development in education as well as other sphere of governance.

Education System in Pakistan

Education, being the tool of providing awareness and ensuring equality in any society, is disseminating in Pakistan through discriminated system. Various parallel educational institutions are working to provide education and divided on various basis including communication medium/language, class and ideology. Before partition, English was the official language of the colonial masters which inherited to the dividing new states of the subcontinent. English remains the official language in Pakistan till now while Urdu becomes the national language. So eventually two systems of education evolve, one is English medium school and the other one is Urdu medium school. Another division is made on the basis class system in the society leads to public and private school system. Public school are state-run school where students given the uniforms and books etc and low fee structure. While private school are opposite of public school which are expensive and afforded by elites of the society. Those institutions which are formed on the basis of specifically ideology, madrasah system. Moreover there is not adequate infrastructure in education system of Pakistan as per the Pakistan education statistics (2015-2016) 9% of schools do not have office block and knowledge being delivered in open, approximately
58% of institutes have access to electric power. Furthermore Annual Status of education showed results in 2014 that 46% of boys 5-16 years old and 39% of girls only could read textual units in Urdu language. In 2016 theses statistics were dropped to 43% for boys and 36% for girls which infers that the quality of education in Pakistan is getting poorer.

### Various Education Policies under Different Political Regimes In Pakistan

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<td>2017</td>
<td>National Education Policy</td>
<td>Muhammad Nawaz Sharif</td>
<td>Democratic Civil Government</td>
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Marie Lall in her book “Education as a Political Tool in Asia” explains that how governments and political authorities control and impose the specific identity through curriculum in schools or education institutions. Numerous education policies, conferences and reforms are introduced and implemented by different political regimes under specific situations prevailing at that times. Every policy and education plan launched by a political regime had specific circumstances and underlying sociopolitical contexts.

During initial years of independence, Pakistan as a state facing crucial administrative issues and political disturbances coupled with weak education infrastructure with literacy rate less than 15% in 1947. Politics and education are highly influenced by the Islamic ideology and national identity as these are the basis of creation of Pakistan. First National Education Conference in 1947 held after three months of creation of Pakistan. This conference provides the foundation stone to education system of Pakistan and led towards the series of conferences and reforms in educational system. Six committees were formed including committee for scientific research and technical education, adult education, primary and secondary education etc. These committees were given specific area of education and divide the objectives to get better and quick results. Death of Quaid-e-Azam (Governor and founder of Pakistan) in 1948, assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan 1951, first Martial Law in Lahore imposed in 1953, and Bengalis protest in 1954 aggravates the political instability within the country which led towards the imposition of martial law in the country. Two five years plans were made i.e. National Plan of Educational Development: 1951-57 and Five Year Plan: 1955-60. Objectives including improve the quality of education, increase the number of trained teachers, raise the ration of literacy set
in first education conference and two five years plans but could not be materialized effectively in these unstable sociopolitical conditions.

Instability in mainly political and economic sphere led towards the imposition of Field Marshal Ayub Khan who took charge of the country and became president in 1958. He set up commission on education in 1959. Political instability weakens the social fabric. Students were highly active in politics and universities became the centers of turbulence. Report of Commission on National Education was brought which designed new changes including the reorganization of education to get immediate literacy in the country. Primary and adult education was given more importance and made it compulsory for the children. Second and third five years plans were also launched with new and advanced objectives to revolutionize the education system and improve the quality of education especially at primary and secondary level. In 1965, Pakistan faced another traumatic situation, war between Pakistan and India ended with Tashkent Declaration. University campuses were high politicized due to weak administration. Grave protest against Ayub Khan compelled him to resign. He resigned in 1969 and gave the power to General Yahya Khan, another military person instead of giving position to civil government. Rising unemployment, political instability, unrest in East Pakistan and students’ restive attitude led to more chaotic situation. General Yahya Khan introduced Education Policy in 1970 which provided more facilities to the students. The implementation process could not be materialized as Pakistan and India fought a war in 1971 caused the succession of Bangladesh.

General Yahya Khan resigned in 1970 and handed over the power to Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who became the president of Pakistan. War with India and separation of east wing of Pakistan were great shock to political and ideological basis of Pakistan. Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto nationalized the educational institution to enhance the quality as well as to provide equal education to all but this adversely affected the education system in Pakistan. Marginalized group did not get benefit while elite and middle class get subsidy in education which they hardly need of it. Education Policy 1972 was launched by new government of Pakistan People’s Party and Five year plan failed to deliver their objectives due to unstable political conditions.

Democratic process again disrupted by military as election was held and boycotted by the opposition who alleged rigging. General Zia ul Haq imposed martial law in 1977. He held for the purpose of avoid political crisis and for conducting election within 90 days but he didn’t fulfil his words and became president of Pakistan. Zia Islamize all spheres of life as he came in to power due to Nizam e Mustafa movement. Madrasah system was flourished with high intensity. The islamization process had deep impact over curriculum, school systems and education infrastructure. In 1979, he presented fifth five year plan which reviewed the past performances and formulated policy for reordering the national priorities and make a comprehensive approach in favor of primary education. He took different initiatives the 10-point Programme (1983), National Literacy Plan (1984-86), Drop-in schools (1986-89), Nationwide Literacy Programme (1986-90), Nai Roshni Schools (1986-90). He also set up Literacy and Mass Education Commission (1981) and Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-88) aimed at utilization of mosques and appoint imam as teacher.

General Zia Ul Haq was died in air crash and general election were held. Benazir Bhutto was elected as Prime Minister in 1988 who was dismissed after two years as President dissolved the assemblies and dismissed Benazir Bhutto’s government. In her tenure, she presented Seventh Five Year Plan (1988-1993) which was mainly aimed at improvement of education infrastructure including better school buildings, class rooms and furniture etc. In next election, Nawaz Sharif was elected as Prime Minister in 1990. In 1992, Education policy offered comprehensive recommendations to improve the situation by establishing councils for student teacher and de-weaponizing the students. Eight Five Year Plan (1993-1998) was launched in 1993. This was claimed to bring universalization of primary education. National Education Policy (1998-2010) long useful document devised to achieve long term objectives but this also could not be implemented as civil government dismissed by army chief in 1999.

During General Pervez Musharraf regime, Pakistan was under great pressure due to 9/11 incident. 9/11 Commission Report suggested Pakistan to improve education to avoid and combat terrorism and also provided financial aid to make changes in textbooks and education infrastructure. In 2009, new education policy was prepared but presented after his government.
New civil democratic government was formed in 2008 which presented Education Policy 2009 devised in Musharraf era. This government also made an amendment in Constitution which make Central government responsible for higher education, curriculum development, and Islamic education and meet the standards of education. This amendment also create responsibility for State to ensure free and compulsory education for all children. This free and compulsory education is a considered as a basic right of all children in the country.

**Political issues impact education in Pakistan**

Political instability is one of main reasons and issues of weak education infrastructure in Pakistan. As discussed earlier, various policies formulated, devised best strategies and designed committees to accomplish the objectives set in these policies and conferences. Due to unstable political conditions, these policies couldn’t be implemented as designed.

Civil as well as military governments also envisage the policies to attain desired and set ambitions to strengthen their regimes and introduce changes in curriculum and textbooks in this regard. Governments promotes their agendas under the cover of national identity and religious ideologies. Curriculum is being compromised by the terms and agendas of the right and left wings in Pakistan. Successive governments have increasingly Islamized the curriculum of the various state schools. This was particularly the case under Zia-ul-Haq, whose policy of Islamization radicalized Pakistani society between 1977 and 1988.

Change of government leads towards the change of education policies which derail the process of implementation and development of education in the country. Every new government come up with new set of policies and objectives for education system, lament the previous government performance and disregard the changes already made to improve standard of education. Discontinuity in policy formulation adversely affect the whole education system.

Long and detailed drafts of set of principles and policies hardly came into the process of implementation due to lack of will on the part of political government and leadership. In Pakistan, education is considered as a tool for earning money or getting job for individuals while for political government it is a tool to influence the public to serve their objective. In this perspective, real purpose of education can never be achieved at any cost.

Another important issue is the processes of globalization which have changed the traditional power of the nation over its decisions towards education policy, as nations sense more constrained to develop an independent policy.

Education is predominately influenced by international organizations included OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), Development Banks and International NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) UN (United Nations) agencies, Various mechanisms by global forces sometimes explicit as using of certain sanctions imposed on developing countries like Pakistan and implicit introduce the same through seminars and conferences conducted by these forces. Acceptance of these agreements leads towards the inequitable access to education and poor working conditions for teachers.

**Recommendations**

Less political interference will provide more space to education system to develop and flourish. Political agendas whether local or global must not hinder the progress and development in education sector. Political authorities ensure that implementation of policies are made without any delay.

Reforms introduced like privatization of education are usually finance driven and benefited the haves. Political authorities should make policies to bring the marginalized group within the circle of advantage. Uniform the education system in order to achieve the real objectives of education including nation building and social integration.
Budget allocated for education sector in national GDP should increase according to the challenges pose to the education system in Pakistan. Resources must be allocated while a strong and improved system of accountability must be ensured.

For the sake of professional development of teachers, quality institution developed for proper teachers training.

Proper mechanism must be established for evaluation of curriculum as well as for reforms in the existing curriculum

Methods of evaluation and patterns of exams must be revised in order to develop critical thinking, analytical approach and rational intelligence among the students. Stereotype and outdated methods of exams must be abolished.

**Conclusion**

Policy formulation for education shows the great influence of religion and ideology of Pakistan in the country. Learning about religion became compulsory with the objective to inculcate the moral values in students and make strong social fabric at societal and communal level.

Education is a powerful tool to control as well enforce desired ideologies by political governments and other authorities in the world. Political regimes used it more effectively especially by those which came into power by force and legitimate their political power later on. In Pakistan, Islam as religion make the central core of national identity which is used to unify the nation as Pakistani society is pluralistic including different ethnic groups.

Islam plays very influential role in every sphere including political, economic, socio-legal and education. Education infrastructure was influenced by the Islamic ideology and Islamic principles. The purpose of implementing these ideologies is to serve the political interests which were highly apparent during Zia and Musharraf eras.
References


