

Curating School Climate Through Peace Pedagogy

Abstract

Pakistan has been ranked at the bottom of the Global Peace Index for many years. Educational institutions provide young learners with opportunities to develop universal human values. The study at hand was an intervention planned to introduce peace education modules for teachers' professional development. After a basic needs assessment, schoolteachers in the Capital Territory of Islamabad, Pakistan, were selected, and teachers and head teachers participated together in this professional development workshop. Later, qualitative data were collected through teacher reflections, focus group discussions, instructional practices observed during classroom visits, and feedback from interviews with school leaders. The main objective was to identify effective practices, challenges, and institutional support mechanisms for implementing peace pedagogy in schools. Thematic analysis highlighted that peace pedagogy has positively influenced school climate by creating emotionally safe, respectful, and inclusive classroom environments, even in limited-resource settings.

Keywords: Peace Pedagogy, School Climate, Cooperation, Social and Emotional Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

The students' academic, emotional, and social practices and well-being have a crucial impact on the school environment. Encircling relationships, safety, instructional strategies, and the classroom setting refer to the general standards of school life (Hina et al., 2024). Despite being venues for imparting knowledge and promoting peaceful ideals, educational institutions paradoxically have the capacity to sustain violence. Bullying, racial and ethnic discrimination, and physical punishment are only a few of the ongoing issues that hinder the successful implementation of peace education in schools (Hammaren, 2022). Academic material in many educational organizations still prioritizes over moral and emotional development, which encourages a scrappy learning environment (Bajaj, 2022). The positive school environment promotes student participation, respect for one another, and emotional safety, whereas violence, student stress, student bullying, and subpar academic performance have been identified as indicators of a negative school climate (OECD, 2020). Global concerns about the urgent need. The improvement in school environments through inclusive and value-based educational strategies is a concern that has been raised globally in recent years because incidents of school

Dr Afshan Huma (Corresponding Author)

Associate Professor, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad,

E-mail: afshan.huma@aiou.edu.pk

Gulfareen Fakhra

Research Assistant, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

violence, emotional distress, and social isolation among students have increased day by day. Students feel safe and experience lower bullying when schools foster social understanding and polite communication (OECD, 2020). UNESCO (2019) reported that students recognize social tensions, confront bias, and improve their conflict-resolution skills. Despite the growing significance of awareness, regular classroom communication, instructional methodologies, and school rules, peace education has not been practically incorporated. A practical framework has been used to improve the school environment rather than merely as a theory; systematic research is needed. Peace education has become more important in today's culturally diverse and conflict-affected societies. The need for peaceful learning environments to foster societal harmony and sustainable development has been recognized by educational institutions worldwide (United Nations, 2020).

The concept of peacebuilding through shaping school environments through peaceful teaching methods, school policies, and daily interactions has been highlighted by the idea of curating a school climate through has integrated emotional literacy, ethical thinking, and conflict management into classroom practice by treating students' behavior as distinct from instruction. According to research, kids exhibit better emotional regulation, healthier relationships, and increased willingness to learn when peace principles are incorporated into regular instruction (Harris & Morrison, 2013). While building conflict-resolution skills through communication and mediation with empathy requires further grooming and emotional regulation among students (Saleh & Rukiyati, 2025). Huma (2024) identified the challenges and issues of peacebuilding in Pakistan, as well as the types and forms of existing adverse childhood experiences in various regions of the country. She then developed the peace pedagogy framework for schools and professional development modules for teachers to enhance inner peace, peacebuilding around them, and peace pedagogy within and beyond schools through place-based inclusive pedagogies (Huma, 2025). This paper is the outcome of a study that served as a pilot of the modules and adds to the body of research emphasizing the significance of education through peace pedagogy in peacebuilding and social transformation by examining peace pedagogy as both a teaching method and a school-wide concept.

LITERATURE REVIEW Purpose and procedure

The purpose of this study was to identify effective practices, challenges, and institutional support mechanisms associated with implementing peace pedagogy in schools. This study is a qualitative evaluation of an intervention that examines the contribution of peace pedagogy to fostering a positive school climate. This study also found that instructional settings, student involvement, teaching practices, and the institutional environment all contribute to fostering peaceful environments. We focused on teaching teachers through a peace pedagogy module, collecting teacher reflections and facilitating a focus group discussion during implementation, and finally conducting classroom observations, in addition to principal interviews and teacher focus groups. The participant teachers from four schools in the Islamabad Capital Territory were selected based on an initial survey. One rural (Government girls' school, Kot Hathyal) and one urban school for boys (Government elementary school Chatta Bakhtawar), and one each for girls participated in this study.

Data Sources

Data were collected in three phases: Pre-implementation: teacher reflections (open-ended questions), Implementation: reflective blogs during training modules, and postimplementation: classroom observations, headteacher interviews, and focus group discussions. In the pre-implementation phase, teachers reflected on common practices in schools. Then, teachers received training with three modules - one for inner peace, one for peacebuilding, and one for peace pedagogy. During implementation, teacher reflections on modules of peace pedagogy were gathered in online blogs. In the post-implementation stage, a toolkit was designed for classroom observations and interviews with school principals, and a focus group discussion was conducted to explore teachers' experiences and challenges. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and themes related to school climate and peace pedagogy.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are presented through different interactional dimensions of school life, including teacher–teacher, student–teacher, parent–teacher, and student–student relationships. These interaction-based findings were further analyzed to identify three key aspects aligned with the objectives of the study: (1) effective practices, (2) challenges, and (3) institutional support mechanisms for implementing peace pedagogy in schools.

Section 1: Pre-Implementation and During Implementation

Here are the major findings across the themes identified in teachers' responses to the openended questions before the professional development modules were introduced, as well as in blogs written during the workshop. This section describes what was the status of school climate at that time.

Teachers-Teachers Interaction: A Professional Code of Conduct

Teachers reported that they usually remain friendly with each other but remain in competition, with professional jealousy present. Some teachers were described as noncooperative with one another, and leg-pulling and back-biting were common. Although the teachers were welleducated and qualified, they behaved poorly and did not act professionally. One respondent reported, “In public schools, there is strict observation and a clear-cut code of conduct. Teachers are overburdened and stressed, which is why they usually do not have happy, lively interactions with each other either.

b. Socio-Economic Background

Teachers' behavior with each other depends upon their backgrounds. Respondents mentioned that, despite being highly educated and teaching at elite schools, their behavior is inappropriate. Teachers' behavior is not respectful towards each other. Teachers are part of society, and they behave mostly like other people in society and become discourteous towards less affluent colleagues.

c. Race, Religion, and Ethnicity

Religious acceptance appears to be the most challenging aspect for teachers, while economic differences are more commonly accepted. Interestingly, ethnic diversity doesn't seem to significantly impact the interactions among teachers.

One of the respondents reported:

“Well, it depends on the teacher's belief system. Generally, teachers behave well with their fellow teachers, but in some cases, as I have mentioned above, teachers may have biased treatment toward those coming from remote backgrounds, thinking that they are inferior to those groomed or educated in cities or of the same ethnicity”.

Role of Headteachers

The respondents emphasized that it all depends on the principal; the principal can make schools more inclusive, and if they maintain a professional code of conduct, there is no issue. Teachers, parents, and students have to obey the orders of the authority, and they can control and maintain discipline. Teachers reported that principals do not spend much time with teachers and exhibit autocratic behavior, dictating and ordering. Respondent also mentioned that principals are focused only on results, not on overall organizational behavior or the school environment.

Parent-Teacher Interaction

In this regard, many different perspectives were shared, but an interestingly stated quote to begin with is

“Parents may exhibit anger or aggression when they feel their child is being treated unfairly or when they disagree with school policies or decisions.”

Further, the themes generated through comments are following:

a. Socio-Economic Background

It was reported by public school teachers that parents usually do not visit public schools and only come to address a call about some sort of misbehavior or poor grades in their child. Teachers usually do not interact directly with students, but they do meet the headteachers. Teachers show more respect to parents from well-off backgrounds. They display arrogant, aggressive behavior toward those who do not come from affluent families. The parents either do not visit schools or, if they are called to complain about their child's poor performance or undesired behavior, then the teachers insult and even ridicule the parents, especially when they come from a low socio-economic background. In public schools, children usually come from non-affluent backgrounds, and teachers and headteachers often mention that they are studying here free of cost and that they must perform well.

b. Race, Religion, and Ethnicity

It was reported that in one public school, the students come from the same locality; therefore, their ethnic backgrounds are usually the same. The difference in class, families, and race is there. Some families are considered superior on the basis of either land ownership or religion. Certain families are considered more respectable than others. For instance, they mentioned Chaudhary and Syed, respectively. Whenever they visit school, the headteachers give them extraordinary respect and honor.

Student-Teacher Interaction

Here again, before diving into the themes generated through analysis, one interesting quote stated by a teacher is:

“Sometimes students show aggression towards teachers when they feel they have been treated unjustly.”

a. Socio-Economic Background

Teachers show sympathy for students from non-affluent families and even collect money to cover their educational expenses. They support parents in continuing the child's schooling. The students in public schools come from different backgrounds. Teachers are polite and wellbehaved with the children of influential people. Families that own land and businesses have a higher social status, and teachers seem to be influenced by these families. They do not punish those students very often.

b. Race, Religion, Ethnicity

Teachers maintain a distance from the students of other faiths. They do not act harshly but favor students who share the teacher's faith. Students of other religions feel hesitant to interact with teachers. Their parents also do not come to school very often. Teachers do not provide much support to them.

c. High and Low achieving Students

Teachers mostly behave in a friendly manner with students, but sometimes show frustration or aggression when dealing with disruptive behavior in the classroom or when facing challenges with workload and resources. Their anger usually targets the low-achieving students. Teachers assign roles to students in group work based on their previous performance, and they already hold prejudices against low-achieving students.

d. Students with Special Needs

Teachers in regular schools do not know how to assist students with special needs. They believe these students should attend special schools rather than regular schools. They think these students need special attention and assistance, which cannot be provided when teaching a large class. They also maintain that the students with special needs feel inferior, and other students feel disturbed in the presence of these students. Teachers cannot differentiate between special needs, learning difficulties, and intellectual disability. Teachers use these words alternatively.

Student–Student Interaction

“Students might display anger or aggression due to academic pressure, social conflicts, or personal issues. This can manifest in arguments, defiance towards authority, or even physical altercations.”

a. Abusive Language

Cursing and using abusive language are common among teenagers. They avoid using such words and phrases in front of teachers, but they use them very frequently in playgrounds. They seem to use cursing phrases during aggressive outbursts and fights among students. Teachers and the school administration take strict action: issuing warnings, meting out punishments, and suspending students.

b. Aggressive Behavior

Students mostly remain in a calm, friendly tone with each other in class, but aggressive behavior is more commonly observed on playgrounds, in cafeterias, and outside the school gate. They mostly maintain discipline; only a few of them, who are also involved in “bullying,” sometimes show aggression in classrooms.

c. Bullying

Bullying is reported in school and handled mostly within the school through warning letters and sometimes punishment. A few cases are reported at district offices if there is severe physical violence or abuse. Girls have more verbal bullying and fewer physical fights reported.

d. Grouping

Students form groups, and usually high-achieving students do not mingle with low-achieving students. Even when given collective assignments and projects, they do not work well together, and some of them dominate group activities. In the Government school, students have almost the same socio-economic background, and the groups are not divided on these bases. But language, ethnicity, and religious exclusion are observed. In private schools, socioeconomic differences also matter a lot, and class differences are evident among student groups.

Teachers’ Self-Reflection

Teachers talked of hopelessness, emotional weariness, and a lack of emotional intelligence. Although they were aware that they needed to change on the inside, they lacked the means to do so. Many felt under-supported by the leadership and overburdened by demands. Instead of being meaningful, teaching grew mechanical.

Section 2: Implementation and Post-Implementation Stage

This section presents the changes that occurred during the training, as described in reflections, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations conducted after the implementation of the peace pedagogy framework at the selected schools. The five main themes organize the

findings: Teachers' self-reflection, student-teacher interaction, parent-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, and school climate.

Teacher–Teacher Interaction

a. Inner Transformation of Teachers as the Foundation for Professional Relations.

Teachers' reports of a discernible internal transformation were among the most compelling findings of the post-implementation period. Teachers frequently reported that the training improved their understanding of the value of self-awareness, patience, and emotional control in the workplace. Many teachers reported that before attending peace pedagogy training, they responded to stress emotionally, with criticism, or with conflict, while the training has made them aware of the need to manage their emotions and conduct themselves peacefully. Teachers also reported that their relationships with their peers were becoming "less reactive" and "more reflective." The program emphasized that peace within a school starts with peace within the instructor and urged educators to consider how their emotional state affects others.

b. Development of a Peace-Oriented Professional Identity

The training program had enabled teachers not only to work on inner peace but also to become peace builders, rather than maintaining their traditional identity as subject teachers. This new identity transformed their relationships, and the school changed from a competitive to a collaborative workplace. Teachers were willingly sharing educational resources and adopting inclusive teaching methods, and providing emotional support to colleagues. The teachers explained during focus group discussions that they now understood competition to be harmful for institutional unity.

c. Teacher Well-Being and Emotional Balance

Teachers mentioned that they are experiencing less stress while mindfulness activities are developing better patience and improved abilities to manage work-related pressures and personal challenges. The headteachers confirmed that teachers who received training maintained better attendance rates and showed improved emotional stability. The peace modules, according to teachers, offered them strategies for owning their emotions and balancing work and personal life, which helped them manage their stress levels.

d. Changing Staffroom Culture

The staffroom environment became more respectful after, and teachers were sharing their experiences more openly about how they are helping students using multiple instructional strategies. They reported that staff members developed better communication skills, while their gossip, negative speculation, and sarcastic comments became less frequent. Teachers stopped complaining to each other while they used their reflection notebooks to exchange ideas about classroom challenges. The staffroom evolved from being a place of silent conflicts into a collaborative area according to teachers' feedback.

e. Role of School Leadership in Sustaining Peace

The headteachers participated in the professional development modules. Teachers at schools with participatory leadership by administrators chose to use peace practices. Teachers smoothly transformed the classroom and corridors with the head teachers' willingness and without restriction. They shared that now we know how democratic values build a healthy and happy environment. The protection of school harmony was seen as the headteachers' responsibility more than anyone else. Teachers believed that the sustainability of peace education depended upon support from leadership.

Student–Teacher Interaction A Shift from Control to Care

The trauma-informed peace pedagogy training enabled teachers to adopt care and empathybased inclusive methods in their classroom practices. They were trying to maintain open communication and direct eye contact, and to make a conscious effort to use soft words and address each student by name. Teachers adopted non-violent communication methods to deliver peaceful corrections and listen actively, using statements that began with "I." The students responded better to instructions, showed voluntary participation, and maintained emotional stability.

b. Classroom Emotional Security

The teachers explained how they worked to create an environment that fostered students' sense of safety during their learning. Students felt at ease when they asked questions, shared their thoughts, and admitted their mistakes. The teachers observed that students participated more in class and showed fewer signs of anxiety. Teachers reported that academic performance and classroom conduct improved due to the safe emotional environment. The children used to remain silent, but they now speak with self-assurance.

c. Individual Attention and Empathy

It was observed that teachers were trying to respond to all students, with special attention to those facing difficult circumstances. They were trying to identify emotional distress and traumatic experiences as learning barriers that students cannot see. Teachers learned that student misbehavior stemmed from unmet emotional needs rather than deliberate disobedience. The teachers reported adopting guidance as their new approach after gaining this understanding.

d. Academic Discrimination and Labeling Practices Decreased

The classroom environment showed a clear change through the reduction of students being labeled as either "strong" or "weak." Teachers worked to combat discrimination by creating projects that brought together students of different ability levels. They were trying to ensure that students receive equal access to school resources and activities, regardless of their academic achievement to date. Teachers focused on student development instead of seeking flawless results. Teachers were seen creating a collaborative environment for students' work and progress rather than assigning positions.

e. Trauma-Informed Classroom Practices

Teachers maintained patience when students showed signs of emotional instability. Students received empathetic responses when they shouted, displayed aggressive behavior, or showed fear. Teachers used timeouts, breathing exercises, and quiet spaces, with colors and paper provided to help them express their feelings. They adopted alternate methods to help students calm down. Teachers showed concern rather than anger when they noticed students displaying signs of stress in their behavior.

Parent–Teacher Interaction A Greater Sensitivity and Respect

The teachers reported noticing a major change in their perspectives following their training program. The teachers mentioned that they have learned to acknowledge and appreciate parents, while highlighting the issues and challenges, because they realized how important it is to respect all, regardless of their background or financial situation.

b. Better Interaction

The teachers reported that they now see parents as partners in student learning and, instead of waiting for parents to begin complaining, initiate healthy discussions. The use of WhatsApp and other ways to maintain school communication and to send positive messages to support and encourage.

c. Parents' Participation as Stakeholders

Teachers began involving parents in place-based take-home activities. Parents were able to participate in cultural days, campaigns, and festivities, which improved ties between the school and the community.

Student–Student Interaction A Growth of Cooperative Behavior

The implementation of peace pedagogy led teachers to observe significant changes in student social interactions. Students began assisting each other during activities and sharing materials without being asked. The projects designed for group work provided an opportunity to solve problems together rather than compete. The teachers observed students becoming more comfortable when assisting their classmates who needed help with their work. The natural development of peer tutoring eliminated student hesitation to explain concepts to their peers and learn even better themselves. The collaborative learning environment fostered stronger student relationships and reduced classroom tension, making it a peaceful space.

b. Reduction of Aggression and Bullying

Teachers reported a noticeable drop in bullying and violent behavior following active classroom discussions aimed at resolving conflict. Teachers substituted dialogue, encouragement, and cooperative strategies to avoid harsh punishment. They maintained that students were gradually learning empathy, kindness, and peaceful conflict-resolution techniques. Classroom observations revealed fewer arguments and no significant physical fights during class or playtime; students were seemingly conscious of their behavior and

respected personal boundaries; and the decline in bullying demonstrated the effectiveness of peace pedagogy in promoting polite discourse among students.

c. Social Inclusion

The participation of previously marginalized students was another important shift. Some teachers reported that pupils who were usually silent and cut off from their peers were included in random grouping strategies for collaborative learning. Now these children were participating confidently in group projects and class discussions. Teachers reported improvement in classroom participation, and those pupils started making friends more readily. This demonstrated how students' feeling of safety and belonging was enhanced by peace-oriented activities.

Teachers' Self-Reflection

Training motivated the teachers to incorporate ethical principles into their professional identities. Teachers noted that their connections were enhanced by small ethical acts such as attentive listening, gentle correction, and openness. Ethical commitment evolved from an external rule to a personal obligation. Teachers' identities changed as a result of self-reflection. Teaching was now seen as a duty to raise peaceful people rather than just a regular employment. Teachers had the view that education is a tool for nation-building and social healing. They talked about setting an example of tolerance, kindness, and patience. This identity shift made classroom teaching a meaningful endeavor aimed at creating a peaceful community at the local level.

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of peace pedagogy led to the emergence of several effective practices, such as empathetic teaching, non-violent communication, cooperative learning, and reflective teaching practices. At the same time, multiple challenges were identified, including teacher stress, socioeconomic and religious biases, a lack of training in inclusive education, and limited resources. The study also highlights the importance of institutional support mechanisms, particularly the role of headteachers, school leadership, and supportive school culture, in sustaining peace pedagogy practices. These findings demonstrate that while peace pedagogy has strong potential to improve school climate, its effectiveness depends on continuous support at both the individual and institutional levels.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study emphasizes peace pedagogy for cultivating school climate by providing modules and training on it. Stress, inequality, emotional distance, and poor relationships among teachers, students, and parents have been found in the school climate before implementing peace pedagogy. Teachers were unaware of the influence of emotional factors on students' academic performance, so they reacted with punishment. The studies by Begum (2012) and the OECD (2019) also indicated that school climate becomes negative and conflict-prone when emotional safety and inclusion are lacking (Begum, 2012; OECD, 2019).

The concepts of emotional awareness, empathy, nonviolent communication, social-emotional learning, and cooperative practices have been introduced among teachers during the implementation stage. Teachers' responses showed that they began to recognize their emotional patterns and understood how unresolved stress affected student behavior. This change is consistent with Ashraf and Huma's (2019) studies, which state that the foundation of peace education is teachers' preparedness to make the classroom peaceful. Teachers are considered an important component in creating a caring and peaceful classroom, rather than in managing classrooms.

Insightful changes in the school environment and classrooms have been observed in the postimplementation stage. Students feel more respectful and secure when teachers practice kindness, patience, and fairness in the classroom. School observations revealed supportive teacher behavior, peer cooperation, and reduced bullying. The study by Candel and Cubbon (2013) was also found to be significant in reducing verbal violence and improving student empathy after peace programs. Transformation was identified by teachers as a major outcome. Peace pedagogy makes the teachers peacebuilders, not just subject instructors. Maria Montessori's perspective that education, not politics, forms the foundation of peace has been reaffirmed in our study, just as Wanjiru (2018) stated that teachers' reflective practices help students unlearn harmful beliefs and adopt peaceful values through reflection and modeling. Social-emotional learning and improved interpersonal interactions among students and teachers demonstrated how peace pedagogy helped students modify their behavior, making them more cooperative, emotionally aware, and socially connected. CASEL (2020) and Durlak et al. (2017) have already supported this, emphasizing that social-emotional skills improve students' behavior and academic engagement. However, the study highlights a lack of resources and limited policy support for implementing peace pedagogy in schools, which resonates with Nkengbeza (2016), who noted that teachers showed commitment, but long-term sustainability requires leadership involvement and institutional backing. Headteachers played a key role in supporting peace pedagogy. Schools with supportive leadership demonstrated better implementation, whereas a lack of involvement posed challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that orientation to the modules helped teachers change their own self-care habits and adopt peace pedagogy. Such experiences and professional development trainings can make a significant contribution to improving and curating the school climate. In the preimplementation stage, the relationships were found to be weak, emotional safety was missing, and inequality or discriminatory behaviors were reported. During the implementation of peace pedagogy modules, emotional awareness among teachers was developed, empathy towards children coming from diverse backgrounds was highlighted for the first time, and they actively learned peaceful teaching approaches and strategies to help them heal and come out of the trauma caused by adverse childhood experiences. During the school observation or postimplementation stage, classrooms were found to be a positive, cooperative, and collaborative environment that indicated positive relationships, and students also felt safer and more supported. Hence, peace pedagogy helped teachers, first of all, with self-care and emotional well-being; then in transforming their behavior by incorporating empathy and

compassion, making classrooms peaceful and free from fear and stress; and finally, in enabling children to be calm and happy. Collective and cooperative learning also enhanced students' confidence and developed empathy. Bullying and aggressive behaviors of students were reduced due to clear policies, open dialogue, and support for anger management. The role of headteachers is critical for sustaining peace pedagogy in schools. The study also confirmed that peace values are not just to be infused into textbooks, but are an appropriate direction for the whole teaching and learning process, as well as for social interaction. When peace values are embedded in daily routines and physical spaces are designed with caution and consciousness, schools become healthy and safe spaces. However, for long-term success, teacher training programs, government policies, and school leadership must actively support peace education and collaborate. In conclusion, peace pedagogy does not simply teach peace; it builds peaceful and responsible citizenship. When educators become peacebuilders, schools transform into safe and nurturing spaces that prepare students not only for exams but for life.

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